













# **TRAVELS IN THE WESTERN HIMALAYAS**

**In Search of Paintings**

**M. S. Randhawa**



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*Dedicated to  
my companions in  
Travels in the Western Himalayas:  
Iqbal Kaur Randhawa,  
Mildred and W. G. Archer,  
M. R. Anand, Catherine  
and  
John Kenneth Galbraith*



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# Introduction

**T**HE HIMALAYAS ARE the world's largest mountain range and contain the highest peaks. The Himalayas are also the source of great rivers of India and Pakistan, viz. the Brahmaputra, the Ganges and the Indus, with their tributaries which irrigate large tracts of arid land.

Uplifted from the bed of the world-girdling Tethys ocean about sixty million years ago, the Himalayas along with the Alps are also the youngest mountains. In the lower ranges of the Punjab Himalayas near Bilaspur are found the fossils of the apes, like *Dryopithecus*, who lived in oak forests about twenty million years ago. The find in the Shiwaliks of fossils of *Ramapithecus* more than a million years old and Palaeolithic tools almost half a million years old indicates that it was one of the centres of man's evolution.

In Hindu mythology there are frequent mentions of the Himalayas. Shiva lived on the mountain Kailash, and married Parvati, the daughter of Himachal. It is stated in the *Mahabharata* that after renouncing the throne, the Pandavas, led by Yudhisthira, the eldest, and accompanied by Draupadi, set out on foot on their last journey to the Himalayas. Pinjore near Chandigarh, and Manali in the Kulu Valley are the places traditionally associated with the Pandavas. The River Beas itself is named after the sage Vyasa. It was the foothills of Nepal where the great teacher Gautama the Buddha was born in 563 B.C. at Lumbini.

Kalidasa (fl. fifth century), the great poet of India, in *Kumarasambhava*, 'The Birth of Kumar the War-God', gives a fine description of the Himalayas, the lord of mountains where demigods rest in the shade of clouds, below the peaks, and the wind shaking the pines carries the spray from the torrent of the Ganges which refreshes the hardy hillmen. In *Meghaduta*, the 'Cloud-messenger', Kalidasa describes the city of Alaka in the Himalayas, the home of the Yaksha who was banished and lived in exile in Central India. The Yaksha gives a message to a cloud to visit his beloved wife and to inform her of his plight. The journey of the cloud includes a description of many places in India, including the Himalayas.

After the 11th century we see a definite decline in taste in India. There are few references to beautiful trees and mountains in Hindu literature. The descriptions of mountains and flowers are stereotyped, and are based on rhetoric rather than on observation.

The Turks and the Afghans who were the masters of India from the 13th to early 16th centuries were busy building forts, mosques and mausoleums, and there is no mention in history of their fondness for mountains. In that age, the Himalayas were a closed chapter in Indian literature.

The Mughals who came from central Asia were lovers of nature and of most good things in life. Akbar (1556-1605) was fond of Kashmir, and Nasim Bagh near Srinagar was planted by him. He also sent an expedition to the Himalayas to discover the source of the Ganges. Manucci relates in *Storia Domogor*, "He selected persons of good judgement and provided them with everything necessary—servants, conveyances, and sufficient money. They were on their travels for several months, and at the end of the time they returned and repaired to the king. He asked them what they had seen and where they had been. After all, the only thing they could say was that they had climbed many mountains, keeping always to the course of the stream which grew smaller each day. After a long march, they reached the mountains covered with forest. It was hard work for them to get through. After they had traversed these woods, they encountered a very high and large mountain which had at its foot a great cow's head sculptured out of the very rock. From the mouth in this head issued a stream of water with such force that no one could keep his feet in front of it. They exerted themselves to ascend the great mountain, to see whether there was any river beyond it. But it was not possible to reach the top. Therefore they turned back and reported what they had seen." This was the first recorded expedition to the Himalayas aimed at the advancement of knowledge of geography.

Jahangir (1605-1628) was a naturalist and had great love for plants, birds and animals, which his artists painted for him. Most of the Mughal gardens in Kashmir owe their origin to him and his successor Shah Jahan (1628-1658). Jahangir's observations on the scenery of the Kashmir Valley are poetic and show a genuine delight in nature.

The British appeared on the Indian scene in the 17th century. They were a force to be reckoned with by the middle of the 18th century. They came from a beautiful green island in the Temperate Zone. In their homeland in the Elizabethan age (1558-1603) there was a harmonious balance of the forest, the field and the city. The towns were not overcrowded; and mingled with rows of shops were many pleasant gardens and farmsteads. It was the age of Shakespeare and as Trevelyan observes, "The English language had touched its moment of fullest beauty and power; and the effect of quiet contact with nature upon human achievement and quality was realized. In the 18th century there was a beautiful equilibrium between

man and nature in England which was a land of art and elegance." White of Selborne and other naturalists taught their countrymen to observe the world of nature.

In the early 19th century, the poetry of Wordsworth, Keats and Tennyson promoted love for nature and mountains among the British. Ruskin in his lucid prose evoked love for clouds, vegetation and mountains. As Trevelyan observes, "He gave new eyes to his countrymen in their journeys to the Alps and to Italy and in their walks in their own familiar woods and fields." The English aristocrats, merchants and industrialists flocked in thousands to explore the Alpine meadows and mountains of Switzerland. It is the people with this background who were in power in India towards the close of the 18th century and early 19th century. The British Governor-Generals from Wellesley (1798-1805) to Dalhousie (1848-1856) were energetic men, the children of the industrial and agricultural revolution of England, who were confronted by a stagnant civilization. The expansion of British domain in India was due to the energy of these men who encouraged travel and adventure in a land which was totally different from their homeland in climate, culture and civilization.

The history of travel in the Himalayas falls into three phases, viz. travel and exploration, mountain-climbing, and picture-hunting.

The earliest European travellers to the Himalayas were the Jesuit missionaries inspired by Christianity, travelling to promote their religion. The first rough map of the Himalayas was drawn in 1590 by Father Montserrat, a member of the Jesuit Mission to the Court of Akbar. The Jesuit missionaries Antonio de Andrade and Manuel Marques reached Tsaparang in Tibet after crossing the Mana pass in 1624. After setting up a mission in Tibet, they returned to India via the Baralacha and Rohtang passes.

British interest in the exploration of the Himalayas dates to early 19th century. In 1807, W.S. Webb, an army officer, explored the course of the Ganges from Hardwar to Gangotri. In 1808 the British were greatly concerned about their northern border on account of the ambitions of Napoleon who was romping over Europe. They negotiated a treaty with Maharaja Ranjit Singh of the Punjab in April 1809, thus extending their influence up to the Sutlej. Then followed an era of active exploration in the Punjab Himalayas, pioneered by William Moorcroft. He was a veterinary surgeon who wanted to discover the possibilities of wool trade with Tibet and to buy hill ponies for use in horse-breeding. In 1812, Moorcroft and Hearsey, disguised as *sadhus*, under the assumed names of Mayapuri and Hargiri, entered the Hundes province of Tibet via the Niti pass. From 1820 to 1825, Moorcroft travelled in the Punjab Himalayas. He was the first man to record the collection of Kangra paintings which were with Maharaja Sansar Chand at Alampur in the Kangra Valley. Moorcroft died at Andkhui in Afghanistan in August 1825.

G. T. Vigne travelled in the Punjab Himalayas from 1835 to 1838 and

among other places, visited Kangra, Chamba and Basohli. His is a classic account of the Punjab Himalayas and reveals a keen sense of observation.

In 1835 an Austrian, Baron Charles Hugel, travelled in the Punjab hills, Kashmir, and also met Ranjit Singh at Lahore. He was well-placed in his native Austria and was not travelling for profit. His observations on people and places are vivid and reveal a scientific temperament. He visited Bilaspur, Nadaun, Haripur Guler, Nurpur, Pathankot, Jasrota and Srinagar.

By the close of the 19th century enough was known about the Himalayas through the efforts of the travellers and officials of the Survey of India. With the beginning of the 20th century, started the phase of mountain climbing. The pioneer was Dr. Longstaff who, in 1907, reached the summit of Trisul (23,360 feet) in Kumaon. In 1909, Duke of Abruzzi, an Italian, reached 24,600 feet on Chogolisa. He was followed by another Italian, De Filippi, who organized an expedition to Karakoram in 1913-14. In 1922, Finch and Bruce reached 27,300 feet in their Everest climb. Now the Germans also started to take interest in the Himalayas, and in 1929 Baur organized an expedition to Kanchenjunga. Two members of this expedition, Allwein and Kraus, reached 24,250 feet. In 1934, the Germans organized an expedition to Nanga Parbat and two of them, Aschenbrenner and Schneider, reached 25,280 feet. In 1939, Karpinski, a Pole, climbed Nanda Devi East (24,391 feet). Everest was climbed by Tensing and Hillary in 1960, and by a party of Indian army officers led by H. S. Kohli in 1939, and also by an American party in

On July 21, 1939, the Americans Neil Armstrong and Edwin Aldrin reached the moon and since then all efforts at mountain-climbing appear puny. Man has entered space in defiance of gravity. The altitude of the highest peak fades into insignificance as compared with the distances travelled in space by the American and Russian astronauts. No disrespect is meant to mountaineers and the courage they have displayed in climbing high peaks at grave risk to their lives and limbs; but it was surely an indication that men should turn to the Himalayas not for inscribing their names on unclimbed peaks, but for a different experience.

The real beauty of the Himalayas is in its flowers, its pine-scented forests, its rivulets with crystal-clear water, the distant views of the snow-peaks and above all in its colourful humanity. To see them, it is not at all necessary to risk one's life and limb on the granite and ice of mountain peaks. Now we go to the mountains to enjoy their silence and to experience tranquillity of mind. As Rousseau observed: "In the mountains, our bodies are more active, our minds more serene, our pleasures less ardent, and our passions much more moderate. Our meditations acquire a degree of sublimity from the grandeur of the objects around us. It seems as if, being lifted above all human society, we had left every low terrestrial sentiment behind; and that as we approach the ethereal regions, the soul imbibes something of their eternal purity."

The Himalayas are divided into two sections, viz. the Eastern Himalayas and the Western Himalayas. The Eastern Himalayas include the Nepal Himalayas from the Kali to the Tista, and the Assam Himalayas from the Tista to the Brahmaputra. The Western Himalayas include the Kumaon Himalayas from the Kali to the Jumna and the Punjab Himalayas from the Jumna to the Indus.

The Punjab Himalayas stretch from Jammu and Kashmir to the eastern boundary of Himachal Pradesh. It includes the District of Kangra, formerly in the Punjab, and now included in Himachal Pradesh. Though no part of this mountain system is in the present-day Punjab, it is still advisable to retain this term which has been popularised by geographers and historians. Political boundaries continue to change from time to time but this part of the Himalayas has bonds of history, language and culture with the Punjab plains, which the passions of religion cannot efface.

Apart from its scenery and cool climate, the Punjab Himalayas also cradled an art of exquisite beauty. It was in these mountains that the paintings of the Kangra School with their rhythmic lines and soft colours were born. For long it was an unknown and lost art. How it was discovered is described in the following account :

In 1910, a traveller visited the Kangra Valley. He was not a mountaineer and had no intention to scale the unclimbed peaks of the Dhauladhar. Nor was he a hunter in search of Himalayan bears, thars and gorals. In the art dealers' shops at Amritsar, he had seen some paintings on hand-made paper with a fluid line and jewel-like colours. He was informed that they came from the collections of princely families of Kangra District. That is why he came to the town of Kangra. This person was Dr. Ananda Kentish Coomaraswamy, a Sinhalese scholar, to whom the credit for the discovery of Kangra paintings goes. Frail and anaemic, he had no zest for tracing the source of paintings and left the Valley after seeing the town of Kangra. However, by this visit, Coomaraswamy blazed a new trail in Himalayan travel.

In 1930, J. C. French, a Bengal civilian, who had love for paintings, took three months' leave and decided to spend it in the Punjab Himalayas. He visited Haripur, Guler, Nurpur, Nadaun, Tira Sujanpur, Baghal, Nahan, Kulu, Chamba and Basohli. His travelogue, *Himalayan Art*, is delightful, and mixed with facts and legends are bits of sound art history. He was the first scholar to claim that Haripur Guler was the birth-place of the paintings of Kangra School. He also noted that before 1750 when the Kangra style originated, there existed a crude type of art which was wide-spread in the hills. It was distinct in its profuse use of primary colours like blue, yellow and red, and a facial formula characterized by a passionate expression of feelings. This was later on identified as the Basohli style.

My first visit to the Punjab Himalayas was in 1929 when I accompanied a



hiking party to Chamba and Pangi. This party was led by Professor Shiv Ram Kashyap of the Government College, Lahore, who was a keen hiker and an authority on Himalayan liverworts. It was on this trip that I acquired a love for mountains and the knowledge of the Himalayan fauna and flora.

My second trip was in October 1948 when I took long leave after a grueling experience as the Deputy Commissioner of Delhi during the riot-torn post-partition days. I rode from Narkanda to Kulu via the Jalori Pass. The trip enabled me to see Saraj. I passed through Ani, Khanag, Shoja, Jibi, Banjar, Larji and emerged in the Kulu Valley at Oot. I ultimately reached the Rohtang Pass. On the return journey I had a glimpse of the Kangra Valley and was fascinated by its gentle landscape.

In 1950, when I was the Director-General of Rehabilitation of Punjab, resettling the refugees from Pakistan, I paid a visit to the Kangra Valley. I rode on horse back and walked to many places in the neighbourhood of Palampur. I visited Nurpur, Haripur Guler, Nadaun, Lambagraon, Dada Siba, Alampur, Tira Sujampur, Kangra, Mandi, Suket, Bilaspur, Nalagarh, Basohli and Jammu. I also saw Narendranagar in Tehri Garhwal and Nahan. During these travels I discovered many collections of paintings some of which I purchased for the Punjab Museum built later at Chandigarh.

In 1952 when I was exploring the Punjab Himalayas, for collecting paintings, I came across the work of another great scholar of Indian painting, Dr W.G. Archer. In 1954, Dr Archer and Dr Mulk Raj Anand, the art critic and novelist, travelled with me to the Kangra Valley. Since then started a friendship which has been immensely rewarding to both of us in our researches in Pahari painting. In 1956, 1954, and 1960, we again visited all the centres of paintings in the Punjab Hills.

In January 1954, I received an invitation to lunch from Professor John Kenneth Galbraith, Ambassador of the United States of America in Delhi. The subject we talked about related to the styles of various schools of Rajput painting in the former States of Rajasthan and the Punjab hills. During my long stay in Delhi, I had so far come across only one genuine lover of Indian painting. He was Malcolm McDonald, the British High Commissioner, who apart from bird-watching, had a keen appreciation of the art of India. I was glad to discover that Galbraith had a sincere feeling for Indian painting. He told me that during the crisis of November 1962 when China invaded Indian territory, and everyone including him was worried and working under stress, he had asked his secretary to bring a collection of books on Indian painting. He was interested in my books on Kangra painting.

Talking to him, I discovered that in a few months he had acquired such knowledge about Indian painting as most people cannot do in so many years. He was able to distinguish the provenance of a painting. He could easily pick a masterpiece out of a sheaf of mediocre works. This is the real test of good taste, discrimination, and developed aesthetic sensibility.

He was to leave India in May jeep. Before his departure he expressed a desire to see soil conservation work in the Kangra Valley as well as places where painting was done. A tour was hurriedly arranged and transport was laid from Delhi to Palampur. From Delhi we travelled by air to Pathankot, and from there we proceeded by car and station wagon in the Valley, during the last week of March jeep. We visited Nurpur, Kangra, Tira-Sujanpur, Palampur and Andretta. This trip laid the foundation of another friendship which resulted in a joint book *The Indian Painting*, in which paintings from the Punjab Himalayas figure prominently.

During these travels I kept a diary which became the source of a number of articles, some of which were published in *The Illustrated Weekly of India*, *The Times of India*, and *The Tribune* and excited a good deal of interest in the Punjab Himalayas and its art.

It was an unusual type of travel in the Punjab Himalayas—by car, jeep, on horse-back and on foot. We climbed no peaks, hunted no tigers, shot no birds. Yet it had all the excitement of the chase. It is almost the rediscovery of a lost art. I feel I must record this experience for the benefit of those who are as yet not familiar with the Punjab Himalayas, an area which, unlike Kashmir and Switzerland, has escaped the baneful effect of tourism. There are no hotels, restaurants, and rows of cars to offend the eyes, and no guides and salesmen to pester you. Though the mileage of metalled roads has increased and the lorry has penetrated some of the remote areas, yet there are valleys which retain their primitive beauty, and where you encounter only gentle Gaddi shepherds and their flocks of sheep.

In the account which follows I have taken note of the observations of the travellers who preceded me. They reconstruct the past often vividly and it is rewarding to read their books on travel, which are rare and can be seen only in some of the old libraries in India.

The text is illustrated with photographs taken by me and by Hari Kishan Gorkha and S.B. Durga. They effectively supplement the description of people and places.

M. S. RANDHAWA



**kangra valley**



## Love at First Sight

“**W**HAT CHINESE ART achieved for landscape is here accomplished for love. Here, if never and nowhere else in the world, the Western gates are opened wide. The arms of the lovers are about each others' necks, eye meets eye, the whispering *sakhis* speak of nothing else but the course of Krishna's courtship, the very animals are spell-bound by the sound of Krishna's flute, and the elements stand still to hear the *ragas* and *raginis*.”

And then again, “Rajput art creates a magic world where all men are heroic, all women are beautiful and passionate and shy, beasts both wild and tame are the friends of man, and trees and flowers are conscious of the footsteps of the bridegroom as he passes by. This magic world is not unreal or fanciful, but a world of imagination and eternity, visible to all who do not refuse to see with transfiguring eyes of love.”\*

This was Dr Ananda Coomaraswamy, commenting in 1916 on Rajput painting of the Kangra school. I came across this passage in 1927, while studying in the Government College, Lahore. People knew about Mughal painting, but few had heard about Rajput painting. The fort and the royal mosque at Lahore were visible reminders of the Mughals, but very few Panjabis knew anything about the hills of Kangra and their contribution to art. On reading Coomaraswamy's *Rajput Painting* my imagination was excited and I wanted to see specimens of Rajput painting.

Not far away from the Botanical laboratories of the Government College on the Mall was the Lahore Museum. Nobody could miss it on account of its high dome, and in front of it was the Zam Zamah mounted on a brick platform. This was the cannon on which Kiplings' Anglo-Indian tramp Kim was mounted when he met the Tibetan Lama. On passing through the turnstile I was confronted by the Graeco-Buddhist Gandhara sculptures recovered from Taxila and other places in northern Punjab and Afghanistan. Apart from these there were old textiles, weapons, musical instruments, and large

\*A. K. Coomaraswamy, *Rajput Painting*. Vol. 1, p. 7, Oxford, 1916

portraits of the Sikh rulers. After examining these poignant emblems of man's transitoriness and vanity, I saw some paintings in gouache on old hand-made paper, displayed in glass-covered show-cases. Ah, their entrancing colours: pure blue, green, yellow, and so many shades of red! Even after the lapse of a century and a half, the colours sparkled like jewels. Ruskin rightly observed that pure colour is the joy of the heart. Apart from the beauty of colour, the singing lines soared in joyous ecstasy! Here, in a painting, was a prince surrounded by his wives and concubines, standing on a terrace, watching the flight of white cranes against a background of purple blue clouds. The cranes were soaring like spirits from an unknown world. Here was another entitled 'Vigil' in which a lovely woman was standing on a bed of leaves below a tree, looking wistfully at the blue curly clouds on the horizon. The next one showed Krishna playing his flute on the bank of a river while his beloved Radha gazed at him admiringly. Women fetching water from a well, travellers resting under a shady banyan, and villagers warming their limbs by a bonfire on a cold winter night, were the themes of some other paintings which reminded me of my own village in Hoshiarpur District at the foot of the Dhauladhar, the snow-covered mountain range of the Kangra Valley. I fell in love with these paintings. Whenever I could find time, I walked across from the Botanical laboratory to enjoy them. In savage Lahore with its narrow tortuous lanes, and etiolated humanity, it was a great relief to see these paintings off and on.

On returning to the village, the sight of the mountains of the Kangra Valley had a new meaning for me. It was there that the paintings I had seen and admired in the Lahore Museum were painted. From the terrace of my home I watched the glistening white Dhauladhar with longing and reverence. Behind the purple blue Shiwalik hills, it was standing like a white wall dominating the mango-studded landscape of Hoshiarpur. There it was before me, a shining lump of silver, the crown of the Punjab plains, the monarch of the Outer Himalayas! Although it was clearly visible during winter, in early summer it used to disappear, wrapped in a mantle of dust particles and haze. This periodical appearance and disappearance deepened the sense of mystery, and awakened an intense desire to see it at close range in the Valley itself.

Chalk cliffs shining like marble with a vast expanse of blue water at their feet—this was my first impression of Dover in the spring of 1932. A thin layer of soil on rocks of white lime. On both sides of the railway line the advertisements of firms selling cigarettes, whiskey, cider, and other drinks with queer names, and beyond a vast sea of green dotted with red houses with sloping roofs. In the backyards, clothes-lines were fluttering like the prayer banners of monasteries in Tibet. The wooden fences of the houses were covered with bunches of pink and red roses. Chestnuts and maples had unfolded tender leaves of a delicate shade of green. Light filtering through their translucent leaves appeared entrancing. Dahlias, larkspurs, and

antirrhinums brightened the gardens of many homes. Apple trees were covered with pale-pink blossoms. Fat brown cows were grazing in the meadows. There were hedges for miles along the boundaries of fields. Parks and gardens dotted with clumps of annuals looked cheerful, but the most beautiful blossoms in these gardens were the English maidens with rosy cheeks and sparkling eyes, wearing summer dresses with floral designs.

The sky was grey, and it was snowing. Pavements were encrusted with ice. Trees were bare, and their dark leafless branches were powdered with snow. Apart from a few plump pigeons sheltering below the chimneys of the houses, and sea-gulls flapping their wings, there was no other sign of life. This was my first winter in London. The massive granite buildings which must have been originally grey were covered with a layer of soot. Certainly, it was not a climate which would ripen mangoes or rear a warm-hearted humanity. In buses and underground trains people sat glum, covering their faces with newspapers, pretending to be oblivious of one another's existence. Every Englishman's home was a castle with its doors tightly shut against all outsiders. I soon realised that one could be very lonely in London.

There were two Indian habits which I could not shed even in London, *viz.* a bath every morning, much to the despair of the English landlady, and a walk every evening. I discovered a place where I could have a walk in spite of the inclement weather. It was the British Museum with its mile-long galleries. Here was a place where I could combine physical exercise with education and entertainment. In one of the galleries, I discovered a collection of Indian paintings. In a painting was shown a beautiful woman seated on a bed of flowers on the edge of a lotus-studded lake under a dark sky spangled with stars. Here was the woman of India, shy, modest, and beautiful, in wait for her lover. I was reminded of the paintings of the Kangra School, which I had seen in the Lahore Museum. In London, this was another encounter with a Kangra painting of unusual charm. Memories of the village, the mountains of Kangra, the womanhood and sunshine of India came rushing to my mind. For a moment, I forgot that I was in London.

In the autumn of 1934 I returned to India. After spending ten years in Uttar Pradesh, I came to Delhi in 1945, and to Jullundur in Punjab in 1949. It was a Punjab ravaged by the partition, with burnt villages, and the countryside dotted with refugee camps. I was entrusted with the agonising job of rehabilitating the refugee farmers who had migrated from West Pakistan. Among them were land-owners of Kangra who had returned from the canal colonies of Montgomery, Multan, and Lyallpur. The policy was to resettle the colonists in their home districts. There was a tea estate in Palampur in the Kangra Valley, comprising a thousand acres of land, which, the Kangra refugees desired, should be allotted to them. Other interests demanded that it should be allotted as an industrial unit, along with the factory. I thought it was a problem which would only be satisfactorily solved by a visit to the Kangra Valley.



The impact of the Valley and her people on me was the same as that of Beatrice on Dante. Besides, this was the home of the paintings I had seen in Lahore and London; paintings in which human love has been represented in line and colour with great delicacy. These are paintings of ageless beauty which continue to throb with passion even after the lapse of a century and a half. Paintings, literature, folk-songs, the people, and the mountain scenery, all combined, wove a spell, which kept me happy as if in a trance.

## The White Mountain Range

**B**EHIND THE BLUE Shiwalik hills appears a mighty snow range, which dominates the mango-studded landscape of Hoshiarpur so completely that everything else dwindles into insignificance. The Dhauladhar or the White Mountain Range, as it is called, appears on the northern horizon in the month of January with a magical suddenness and disappears from view at the end of April, shrouded in a mantle of dust particles and haze.

From the roof of my house in a village in the submontane of District Hoshiarpur in the Punjab, I contemplated the White Mountain Range and gazed at it for many hours. It had a strange fascination for me, and I looked at it with longing and reverence. I had glimpses of the Dhauladhar from the travellers' rest house at Ban Khandi and felt its sublime beauty. Situated on the hill road from Hoshiarpur to Una, this lonely building is perched like an eagle's eyrie in the Shiwaliks. I had another view of the Dhauladhar from the temple of Chintpurni and it seemed to attract me like a magnet. There it appeared, shining like a lump of silver, the crown of the Punjab plains, eternal and vast, a monarch of the Outer Himalayas.

I decided to have a closer view of the Dhauladhar in its home, the Kangra Valley, the Valley of the river Beas and its numerous tributaries. The Kangra Valley is known for the mellow beauty of its landscape, its low hills and valleys studded with charming hamlets. Through the terraced fields with wave-like embankments, run numerous snow-fed rivulets with pure sparkling water. Contrasting with the feminine beauty of the low hills is the mighty Dhauladhar with its snow-covered peaks and fanning glaciers which cast a spell on the visitor. In its forests and alpine pastures peace and silence reign.

It is not only an attractive landscape which makes a country beautiful, but also its people. Here in the Kangra Valley, coupled with the beauty of the landscape is the beauty of humanity. In the mysterious forests of the Dhauladhar wander the lovely Gaddi maidens, unconscious of their beauty, living a life of pastoral simplicity. In the hamlets in the valley are

shy Rajput and Brahmin women, clad in graceful *ghagras*, their serene faces decorated with large nose-rings, and their jet-black hair crowned with golden conical ornaments, the *chowks*. In this valley we also find the Kangra paintings known for their ageless beauty, in which human love has been represented in line and colour with great delicacy, and which continue to throb with passion even after the lapse of two centuries.

I started in quest of the beauty of the Kangra Valley, its mountains, its humanity and its well-known paintings in March 1950. After motoring through the Punjab plains, we entered the District of Hoshiarpur by the Jullundur-Pathankot road, one of the most picturesque roads in the Punjab, which passes through the mango belt below the foothills. The road passes over numerous hill torrents which have been bridged. People say there are as many bridges as there are miles to cover. The mango trees were laden with pale-yellow blossoms which filled the air with fragrance. The fields were green with wheat and the wheat stalks were waving gracefully in the morning breeze.

We crossed the Beas over a recently constructed bridge near Mirthal. It was here that the triumphant march of Alexander the Great was halted by the Punjabis led by Porus in 326 B.C. The Greek soldiers were tired and homesick, and expressed a desire to return to their homeland. Alexander, after three days' cogitation, agreed to accede to their request. It was here that he built 12 great altars of hewn stones dedicated to the Greek gods, and retraced his steps homewards. There is no trace of the altars any more, though, it is said that they were long held in veneration by the Hindu Kings of India.

After motoring for eight miles we reached the Damthal *ashram* built on a spur of the Shiwaliks. We approached the *ashram* through a grove of giant banyan trees. The banyans with their cool and shady bowers almost impervious to light, provide shelter to the pilgrims from the heat of the sun. Their aerial roots dangled in the air like the matted locks of the Himalayan sages. We entered a hermitage, which enjoys a unique reputation for sanctity. The entrance to the building is provided by a graceful *deorhi* built in the Rajput style. Adorning the entrance gate was a hive of wild bees. In the inner enclosure of the *ashram* is a cluster of tumuli in which the cremated remains of the *mahants* are buried. The Damthal *ashram* was founded by Narain, a Brahmin of Kahnuwan in Gurdaspur District. It is said that a merchant passed by Damthal leading a string of mules laden with sugar. A group of boys asked him about the contents of the bags and he replied that they contained sugar. Narain, who was among the boys, said that the bags contained sand. The merchant did not take the boy seriously, but on reaching his destination, he discovered that the bags contained only sand. He retraced his steps to Damthal and again met Narain. This time Narain said that the bags contained sugar, and the merchant was agreeably surprised to find that the bags did contain sugar and not sand.

After this incident the story became current that the Brahmin boy could work miracles. Narain was called to Shahdara by the Mughal Emperor, Jahangir, who, to test his supernatural powers, gave him six cups of poison which he drank cheerfully without any ill-effect. To test the potency of the poison, the seventh cup was given to an elephant which died instantaneously. This legend is illustrated in a mural in the temple, where Narain is shown drinking a cup of poison and his Guru, Bhagwan, is seated behind him giving him encouragement in his ordeal. It is also a favourite theme of the paintings in the Basohli style, some of which must have been painted at Nurpur.

It is said that there was a great shortage of water at Damthal, and the villagers suffered terribly. They approached Narain who was performing penance in the forest behind the temple. He struck the ground with a pair of tongs and a spring of water gushed out. We were informed that at the side of the extant spring is a cave, where Narain used to perform penance.

The temple in the *ashram* was built by Raja Jagat Singh of Nurpur about 1646. The audience hall of the temple is decorated with mural paintings in the Kangra style. Its lacquered roof was crumbling, and wasps had invaded almost every room. Apart from the mural paintings already referred to concerning Narain, the other murals illustrate anecdotes from the *Mahabharata* and the *Ramayana*. Krishna sporting with the milk-maids, and the marriage of Rama are shown. In a corner is a favourite theme of the Kangra artists: a lady with a black buck standing under a willow tree. The black buck is the symbol of the absent lover.

The *ashram* is a double-storeyed building. On the first floor is the Rang Mahal or painted palace, built in 1850 and decorated with mural paintings. Most of the figures are heavily bearded, and adorned with bejewelled turbans. The incidents illustrated are from the *Ramayana* and contemporary life. The British appeared on the Punjab scene in the middle of the 19th century. An Englishman accompanied by his wife seated in a stage-coach drawn by four horses is shown in a mural. There are also paintings of the *mahants*, drawn in a pompous style. The Kangra style was already showing signs of senescence, and paintings of this period are ornate and give too much detail.

Hari Das who was the *mahant* of this *ashram* in 1935 carried away the old collection of Kangra paintings. The present *Mahant* Lachhman Das has only a set of paintings of the Durga series. A number of Gandhara Buddha heads brought by an army officer from Taxila and an image of Rishli Markandeya lie in the room. The latter bears a strange resemblance to the *mahant*.

After enjoying a cup of tea which the *mahant* offered us, we explored the forest at the back of the *ashram*. It contains a large number of *tun* and mango trees. The air was filled with the aroma of *Kamni* and *Adhatoda* blossoms, and the ground was carpeted with the blue and purple flowers of strobilanthes and indigofera. On a plateau in the forests was a Gaddi shepherd grazing a

flock of sheep. After enjoying the peace and quiet of the place, we said good-bye to the *mahant*, and asked him to take care of the mural paintings whose value he did not seem to appreciate. Crossing the River Chakki we pushed on towards Nurpur.

# 3

## The Birth Place of Kangra Painting

**I**T WAS STILL dark when we left Pathankot by the metre-gauge train for Haripur Guler. The morning star was shining over the mountains which loomed like ghosts in the darkness of the night. After an hour, the eastern sky changed from dusk to milky grey, and the outlines of the mountains were visible. Soon the grey changed into rose-pink and gold. Against the splendour of the dawn, the steel grey of the snow-covered mountains provided a mellow contrast. Dark green pine forests in which diminutive black cows grazed, and the fragrance of resin reminded us that we were now in the heart of the valley. I could already feel the peace and silence of the mountains.

The railway line is laid along the old trade route through which the Mughal and Sikh armies marched into the Kangra Valley from the 17th to early 19th centuries. On both sides are sloping fields, some with orchards of oranges, flanked by low hills, once the abode of the Ice-Age men. Plenty of Palaeolithic hand tools have been discovered from these river terraces.

When we got down at the unpretentious railway station of Guler, the first impression was disappointing. There was a log-cabin in front of which stood the Station Master dressed in white drill with a green flag tucked under his armpit. This was Guler. Does the man realise that this nondescript place gave birth to the finest painting of India? Does he know its importance in the cultural history of the country? Certainly not! Nor do the educated Punjabis know its worth. When you mention Guler or Nadaun, they think of nothing but cooks and kitchen boys.

With such thoughts in my mind I started walking towards Haripur. Suddenly, the fort came into view. Built on a precipitous ridge across the Banganga, it dominates the landscape and still conveys an impression of power. Haripur is built on titanic boulders and lies in the hollow of an arc-like mountain range, capped by the fort in the north and a temple of Durga

in the south. Passing through the fields of green wheat and mango groves we reached the Banganga, a mountain torrent with hardly a trickle of water in its bed which was strewn with rounded pebbles. During the rains when it is in high flood a ferry boat plies between Guler and Haripur. From the river bank a winding path paved with white stones leads to Haripur. At the base of the trunks of trees are platforms on which wayfarers rest and have their afternoon nap. The streets, the walls of the houses and the platforms below the trees are a curious mosaic of white pebbles. The houses nestle in the shade of giant banyan and pipal trees. Calm prevails in the village, giving it the impression of being Rip Van Winkle's sleepy hollow. We rode through the bazaar, arousing a good deal of curiosity among the people of Haripur, and on the way saw many ruined temples and neglected tanks.

Hugel, who saw Haripur Guler in 1835, had a more favourable impression. He states that the houses were clean and in front of them was usually a small garden stocked with lilics, balsam, rose and jasmine. Men wore trousers and black turbans and invariably had dark, long beards. Women wore blue petticoats with deep red borders and pink veils on their heads. This place is no longer prosperous, and the appearance of the people with their pinched faces conveys an impression of poverty. Beards and black turbans are no longer popular with men, and women wear black petticoats and veils of various colours. The houses are, however, still clean, and plantains are commonly grown in the backyards, fenced with hedges of wild rose.

Passing through the bazaar we reached the *maidan*, a level piece of land, where the Rajas used to play polo. This game was introduced into India by Akbar from Persia, and it became popular with the princes of India, particularly the Rajputs. At the corners of the polo grounds are ruined temples. We had a close view of the fort from there. Much damaged by the earthquake of 1905, and shattered by the tentacle-like roots of the pipal trees which had grown in the cracks in the walls, the fort is still impressive, and dominates the village of Haripur.

Raja Baldev Singh was awaiting our arrival and he received us in front of his palace. I introduced Archer and my friend from Bengal to him. Archer remarked that the Raja had close resemblance to his ancestor Govardhan Chand. Baldev Singh was highly pleased with this compliment, for amongst all his ancestors, he had the greatest admiration for Govardhan Chand, because of his valour and love for art. Later on when I saw a portrait of Govardhan Chand, I found that Archer's observation was correct.

We were taken to a large room furnished with a carpet on which bolsters were scattered. We removed our shoes and made ourselves comfortable on the carpet. I sent a message requesting the Raja to send the paintings. The Raja sent a reply that he would show them in the afternoon. In the meantime, he sent us lunch which all of us heartily enjoyed after the long and tiresome ride to the fort.

We decided to spend the afternoon in the travellers' bungalow overlooking the polo ground. After we had rested, my friend from Bengal started a conversation on art and art-consciousness among the people of India.

"South India produced some noble temple architecture and sculpture. Eastern India, particularly Orissa, gave us a sculpture of great sensuous charm from the 10th to the 13th century. Even the desert of Rajasthan in the last three centuries gave us paintings marked by vibrant colours. What is the contribution of Punjab to art?" he asked.

"Punjab made an outstanding contribution to the art of India by giving her the Kangra paintings. This very place, Haripur Guler, saw the birth of the new art in the middle of the 18th century. It seems that the artists came to Guler during the reign of Dalip Singh, about 1739, when Delhi was sacked by Nadir Shah. His son Govardhan Chand (1744-1773) gave encouragement to the refugee artists from Delhi and Lahore, and this led to the development of a new style of painting which combines the rhythmic beauty of the Mughal line with the spirit of Sanskrit and Hindi classics dealing with the Krishna legend. The drama of love of Radha and Krishna is unfolded in these paintings against the background of the beautiful landscape of the hills."

"That is an old story. What about the present?" asked my Bengali friend.

"Even in contemporary art, one of the greatest figures was a Punjabi Sikh woman, Amrita Sher-Gill. Among the living artists, the most significant is Satish Gujral who has painted with deep feeling the sorrow and suffering of the people of the Punjab during partition."

"Then, how is it that an average Punjabi is not at all art-conscious and many stories are current about their insensitiveness to finer things in life? The prevailing impression about them is that, except their love for fine clothes, good food, and comely women, they have no other interest. A large section of them profess no interest even in their own language and literature."

"What are the stories you have heard about them? Let us have one."

"You might know that the Mughal emperors mostly employed women as servants in their harems. Manucci, an Italian traveller, who recorded his experiences in *Storia Domogor*, narrates that Shah Jahan at times used to test the understanding of the women in his harem. Four women servants from different cities of India once became the subject of a test. He rose at midnight and going into the room of each one asked her if dawn was near. The first one, who was from Lucknow, replied "No", giving the reason that she still had the taste of betel in her mouth. The second who was from Delhi also gave a negative answer because the light of the candle in her room was still bright, whereas when dawn approached, it no longer burnt so clearly. The third from Hyderabad said that it was still a long time to day-break, the reason being that when daylight came, the pearls she wore



felt cold, whereas at that hour this was not so. The fourth, a woman from Lahore, where it is the habit of the women to speak freely, told him that the day would not be here so very soon, for when it was near, she felt the call to relieve her necessities, and at that moment her bowels gave her no such warning.”\*

“That is an old story, very likely untrue. Most travellers fabricate anecdotes to add interest to the accounts of their travels. Manucci, like Marco Polo, had a fertile imagination, and I give no credence to bazaar gossip which he frequently records in his *Storia Domogor*.”

“Here is a recent one about the Punjabis and their reaction to Western music. A Punjabi military officer risen from the ranks was invited by his British colleagues to a music party. Select gramophone records of Western classical and dance music were played. He showed interest only in the rumba dance music. When asked why he liked it, ‘It reminds me of the rattling of utensils in the kitchen’, he replied.”

“This may apply to soldiers from many countries,” I remarked. Since Independence there has been great improvement. Art Academies have been established and there is general awareness about art.”

“This awareness is confined to a very small group of people living in the cities of Delhi, Bombay and Calcutta. The masses have not even the haziest notion about art. Now I tell you about the experience of a Punjabi musician who returned home after many years.”

“Was he not admired for his accomplishments?” I asked.

“Now listen to what happened to him. A Punjabi Brahmin spent five years learning the intricacies of Carnatic music under the most distinguished masters of music in South India. Accustomed to the climate of the North with its cold winters, he could not have been happy in the tropical heat of the South. Besides, he had also to suffer the spicy food and eat coarse rice with *sambar* and *rasam* which contain generous doses of black pepper and asafoetida. Nevertheless, he persevered and worked hard and learnt Carnatic music. When the Guru was satisfied with his attainments, he gave him permission to return. He returned to his home-town of Amritsar and decided to give a demonstration of his skill in music, at the Durgiana temple. Built in imitation of the Golden Temple of the Sikhs, its dome is gilded, but the surrounding tank is full of slimy blue-green algae. Like all imitations, it fails to impress and lacks spiritual atmosphere which we feel in the temples of South India. Undaunted by his environment, the musician invited all his friends, acquaintances and others who professed interest in music.”

“There must have been a large gathering present there to hear him,” I remarked.

“About a hundred persons gathered to hear him. He sang with great feeling with his eyes closed. After finishing the first song, when he opened

\*Manucci, N. *Mughal India*, Vol. I, p. 197.

his eyes, there were about fifty persons present. On the conclusion of the second song, only about ten were still listening to him. When he concluded the third song, only one person was left. The musician was still not discouraged and felt that even if there was a single genuine lover of music who could appreciate his art, he would still be satisfied. Addressing the man he said, 'My good man how do you like my music? You must have liked it, otherwise you would not be here.' 'The carpet on which you are sitting is mine. I was apprehensive that you might walk away with it. That is why I am here,' he replied."

In the afternoon, we paid a visit to the Raja again.

"What is the relationship between the kingdoms of Kangra and Guler?" I asked Raja Baldev Singh.

"Guler is regarded as the senior State. Its name is derived from the word *Gwala*, a cowherd, and its former name was Gwaler, the place of the cowherd. It was founded by Raja Hari Chand who was the ruler of Kangra in 1405. He had gone out hunting and while in pursuit of a boar, he got separated from his companions. After dusk when he was wandering alone in the forest, he fell into a neglected well. After many days, he was rescued by a merchant who was passing by, leading a string of mules. In his absence, his younger brother ascended the throne, presuming him to be dead, and his wives burnt themselves on the cremation pyre. On learning about these events, Hari Chand who was a very noble person moved to the present site of Guler. Here he met a cowherd who pointed out to him the place where you now see the fort. The cowherd was sacrificed and his head was buried under the foundation of the fort to ensure its stability. Such sacrifices were not unusual in those days."

While we were talking, three portfolios of paintings wrapped in cloth were brought. As we were examining the collection, an extraordinary painting came into view. It had also attracted the attention of J.C. French when he saw it along with Raja Raghunath Singh, the father of the present Raja, in 1929. It depicts a popular romance of the hills, the story of a drummer boy who fell in love with a princess. In the background of the painting are the snow-covered mountains of the Dhauladhar. Though the Dhauladhar is so conspicuous in the Valley of Kangra, in no other painting I found it portrayed. In the left half of the painting, the drummer-boy is shown peeping at the bathing princess, whose nude person is seen through the cloth screen erected around the bathing place by the women attendants. Apparently, the princess responded to the blandishments of the drummer-boy. In the other half, she is shown eloping with the boy, whose identity is clear from the drum suspended from his neck. They were pursued by the King's archers, who overtook them and shot them down with arrows. In the second painting of the series, the corpses of the unfortunate lovers are displayed before the King. On the face of the King are mixed feelings of indignation and sorrow. He was satisfied that his honour had been vindicated, but was also sorry

about the fate of his daughter. With what success the artist has shown these emotions on their faces!

In the Raja's collection were many portraits of Govardhan Chand. In some of these, he is shown with the ladies of the harem, and his children. While the offspring of the Ranis are seated close to him on a carpet, those of servant girls, called *Sirtoras*, are seated on *durries*, at a distance. In an equestrian portrait, he is depicted, wearing saffron clothes riding his famous horse. This horse became the object of a war between him and Adina Beg, the Governor of Jullundur Doab. Adina Beg sent a request for the horse. That was refused and was followed by the so-called Horse War in which Govardhan Chand won, and hence retained the horse.

A delightful painting showed Govardhan Chand listening to music. It marks the beginning of the new style. As French observes, "The air of gentle reverie is well-expressed in this painting. It resembles the finest of Mughal paintings but it has a delicacy and spirituality of feeling which Mughal art never attains. The colouring of Kangra pictures of this period is extraordinarily delicate. The Kangra artist had the colour of the dawn and the rainbow on his palette."

After we had examined the Raja's collection, I asked my friend from Bengal, "How do these paintings compare with the revivalist paintings from Bengal?"

"The colour schemes of these Guler paintings are clean, and their line is rhythmical," he remarked. "Surely, these are far superior to the paintings of the Bengal school, which are weak in drawing, and sentimental in conception. Men and women look drowsy and doped, more like lotus-eaters than real persons, in the Bengal school paintings. After all, these Bengal paintings are pale imitations of the wall paintings of Ajanta, and imitations seldom impress. Even their colours are muddy. On the other hand, the colours glow like jewels in the Guler paintings. Punjabis should feel proud of these paintings, which are truly their greatest contribution to the art of India."

I was glad to hear the comment of my Bengali friend on the renaissance art of Bengal. I admired his candour and truthfulness, which are so rare in chauvinists.

"Punjabis never recognise their own men nor their culture," I said. "When an outsider comes to Punjab, they are ready to receive him with garlands. The farther his home, the larger the garland, and the bigger the adoring crowd. But for their own man, they have nothing but brick-bats. When their greatest saint, poet and mystic Guru Nanak said, '*Ghar da jogi jogra, bahar da jogi siddh*', (none is a prophet in the land of his birth), he must have said it due to frustration and lack of recognition from the people who were about him. Have you heard about Puran Singh? Probably not. Not many educated Punjabis know about him, and only a few may have read his work. His contribution to Punjabi poetry is as important as that of Tagore to Bengali poetry. His English prose has poetical

charm, and a rare rhythmic quality. His solitary essay in Hindi is regarded as a classic by Hindi scholars. Yet he died an unrecognised man. Avinash Chandra is now a famous artist in London, whose paintings have been televised in England as well as in many European countries. Yet no one knows him in Punjab. Even Satish Gujral would have remained an obscure and impecunious artist, painting covers of publicity magazines of the Government, had he not left Punjab. Mulk Raj Anand, the novelist and art critic, when he returned home to teach art and culture to the Punjabis, found empty lecture halls. Khushwant Singh, only when he escaped to Paris, was given a tardy recognition as a writer."

"You are unnecessarily harsh to the Punjabis," my friend remarked. "They are in the vanguard of progress in modern India, and have contributed to its industrial development."

"It is the working men, carpenters, blacksmiths and farmers who have ancestral skill and stamina and have taken to the machine as a duck to water. The middle classes are still vulgar. Apart from spicy food and well-decorated women, they seldom have any higher interest in life. Go to their homes, you will find flashy sofas, curtains and numerous group photographs and portraits, but no books or paintings. They even spurn their own language. While they profess to show such keen attachment to the national language, they are utterly ignorant about it."

"That cannot be correct," remarked my friend. "They mounted a most furious agitation in favour of the national language. They must be familiar with its beautiful poetry."

"They also mounted an equally furious agitation when a poem of the greatest classical Hindi poet, Keshav Das, was presented in a Punjabi translation," I replied.

"This is truly amazing," remarked my friend, who was already feeling like Alice in Wonderland, with everything getting curiouser and curiouser.

Reverting to the subject of painting at Guler, we found that it continued to receive encouragement from Parkash Chand, the successor of Govardhan Chand. There are many delicate portraits of this ruler and his *ranis*. In one of them, he is seen visiting a money-lender. He was a spendthrift and got into financial difficulties. While the fortunes of the Guler Raja were on the decline, the star of a neighbouring Raja, Sansar Chand of Kangra, was in the ascendant. From the court of Parkash Chand, the artists migrated to Tira Sujanpur to work for Sansar Chand.

Guler was annexed by Ranjit Singh in 1813. The Sikh influence is visible in the paintings relating to Bhup Singh's reign as well as in those of his successors, Shamsher Singh and Jai Singh. Well-groomed beards parted in the middle and rolled up towards the ears became fashionable, and are seen in most portraits relating to this period.

Painting as an art ceased to be practised seriously at Guler after 1880. This was mainly due to the changed social conditions and the changed sense of

values. Whatever may be the shortcomings of the feudal system of society, it must be said to its credit that it inspired and encouraged an art of imperishable beauty and unsurpassed delicacy and loveliness. With the decay of the feudal system after the conquest of the valley by the British, the art of painting in the Punjab hills languished due to lack of appreciation and patronage.

## Playing Music to a Buffalo

**A**DMIRING THE SUNSET in the mountains we crossed the Chakki river and found ourselves on a road shaded by shisham trees. The road ascends gradually and is flanked by orchards of mangoes and oranges. The Nurpur fort, above the River Chakki, was now in sight. The hills around Nurpur are dry and barren. Extensive erosion has washed away the top soil, exposing red rocks which can only support the hardy oleander, the pine and the shisham.

We arrived at the forest rest house of Nurpur, spread our blankets on the *newar* charpoys, and made ourselves comfortable. While my companions were resting, I sat in the verandah, watching the mountains. From there a panoramic view of the snowy peaks can be had. Towering above the forest of pines is a semicircle of snow-covered mountains. On the right is the Dhauladhar and on the left the Pir Panjal of Jammu. On the north-west sprawls the town of Nurpur on a flat hill.

While I was admiring the sublime majesty of the mountains, a visitor turned up carrying a portfolio under his arm. He gave his name as Kartar Singh, a scion of the Wazir family of Nurpur, and claimed to be the grandson of Mian Ram Singh Pathania. He sat on a chair and opened a bundle which contained the coat of mail of Ram Singh. I am not interested in weapons or coats of mail and was impatient to examine the paintings. He opened the portfolio which contained a large collection of paintings, some in good condition but many with burnt edges. This was the first authentic collection from Nurpur, and we were excited over the find.

We may have to refer to the history of Nurpur after the death of Raja Bir Singh. Bir Singh left a minor son, named Jaswant Singh, whose chief officer was Ram Singh Pathania, son of Wazir Sham Singh. Ram Singh was a brave Rajput who dreamt of the restoration of the ancient glory of Nurpur. In 1846 he collected a force in Jammu, crossed the Ravi, and occupied the Shahpur Fort, where he proclaimed Jaswant Singh the Raja of Nurpur, and himself, his Wazir. The small town of Shahpur Kandi, now very much depopulated and decaying, was a prosperous trading centre

in the 18th and early 19th centuries when rich caravans used to pass that way. The Shahpur Fort, now in ruins, is on the left bank of the Ravi. While most of the towers and battlements have crumbled, one of the towers overlooking the river has been converted into a rest-house from which one can have a splendid view of the hills and the sweeping curve of the river.

When the British came to know of the revolt of Ram Singh Pathania, they sent a force from Hoshiarpur to besiege the Shahpur fort. Ram Singh and his followers vacated the fort by night and took up a position on the wooded slopes below Nurpur. Ram Singh was defeated, and he fled to Gujarat where he was given shelter by the Sikh army. In January 1849, he returned with two Sikh regiments and took up a position on the Dalla ki Dhar, a rocky ridge in the Shiwaliks overhanging the Ravi, north-east of Shahpur. Dalla ki Dhar was invaded by General Wheeler. The battle was fiercely contested, and the British army also suffered heavy losses. Ram Singh fled to Kangra and took shelter with a Brahmin who betrayed him to the British for gold. He was banished to Singapore, where he died. The exploits of Ram Singh are still sung by the hill bards, reminding the people how bravely the Pathania Wazir fought the pale-faced *Feringhees* on the heights of Dalla, while the drums rolled and the cannons boomed.

Kartar Singh informed us that the paintings got burnt when Ram Singh's house was set on fire by the British. The smouldering bundle was rescued from the burning house by the ladies of the family. The Rajput nobles, like the Samurai of Japan, were greatly attached to their collections of paintings. When Ram Singh learnt about the damage to his paintings he was greatly grieved and wept bitterly.

Archer was very interested in the burnt fragments of the paintings in the primitive style of the 17th century —a style that prevailed in most hill states. I look for beauty in paintings and mere antiquity is of little interest to me. I found a number of the mid 18th-century paintings with a bright red background and lavish use of cheerful yellow and blue colours. The theme of these paintings was love: a prince enjoying himself in the company of semi-nude women; a princess eloping with a mahout; and a thief making love to a half-clad princess. Another lovely painting showed Radha dancing before Krishna and his companions who were watching her with ecstatic delight.

While I was absorbed in these paintings the noise of a motor car was heard and out came an official of the Punjab Government, who was known to me. He was so dry and colourless that all happy thoughts and day-dreams vanished at the very sight of him.

"What are you doing here in these wild mountains?" he asked.

"I am here on leave with two friends and we are touring the valley to study the Kangra paintings."

"If I were you I would go to Bombay, stay at the Taj Hotel and enjoy

the high life of the gay city. What is the use of knocking about in these mountains?"

"I find the paintings from the Kangra Valley more interesting than the hotels and the dance clubs of Bombay, the resorts of most plutocrats."

"Is it so? How interesting ! I have heard of Mughal paintings. What are these Kangra paintings? Does it mean that these hills also produced an art? With such a backward and conservative population I have grave doubts that they could have produced any worthwhile paintings."

"Before I tell you about the Kangra paintings, let me give you a brief history of Indian painting. Then you will be able to understand this art in the historical perspective."

"If it is not too long and boring, I will stay on here for a while to listen to you."

"You may have heard that painting in India began in the Ajanta caves in the second century B.C. to fifth and sixth centuries. The walls of Ajanta caves were decorated with frescoes illustrating the chief events from the life of the Buddha. These paintings are characterised by supple naturalism and fluid grace. The Ajanta style is a strange blend of the sensuous and the spiritual. In these paintings we see the rhythmic line which remained the basis of Indian painting in the succeeding centuries. We also see a sense of relief and roundness in them, and the figures stand out in the darkness of the caves giving an impression of a living humanity. How the Bodhisattva with the blue lotus looks at you with his dreamy eyes full of compassion! The Ajanta paintings hold a central place in the pictorial art of Asia and they influenced painting in both Central Asia and China. The Ajanta style in India was continued in the frescoes of Bagh and Sittanavasal caves in the seventh century."

"What type of painting prevailed after Ajanta?"

"After the Ajanta paintings, there is a gap of about four centuries till we come to the Pala period in the 11th and early 12th centuries. The chief religion of the Pala kings who ruled the area, now included in Bengal and Bihar, was Buddhism. During their rule themes from the Buddhist religious texts were painted on palm leaves. These paintings are more or less in the Ajanta style and are characterised by the same softness and tenderness. The basis of this art also is the rhythmic line combined with bright colours. This style later spread to Nepal and other States in the eastern Himalayas."

"Buddhism ceased to be an important religion in India by the close of the 12th century. Was any painting done in any part of India during that period?"

"In the 12th century, Gujarat in western India became the centre of a school of painting. Gujarat was a flourishing centre of commerce and Jain merchants gave patronage to the artists who illustrated anecdotes from the lives of their religious leaders, Neminatha, Parsvanatha and Mahavira. The earlier of these paintings which illustrated the texts of *Kalpasutras*,



their religious texts, were painted on palm leaves. In the 13th century, India was invaded by the Muslims from Afghanistan. These invasions caused a good deal of devastation. However, they exposed India to new influences. In the 14th century, hand-made paper was introduced in India by the Muslims from central Asia where it had earlier been introduced from China. This was indeed a big event in the cultural history of the country. The Jain miniatures from the 14th century onwards are on hand-made paper. They are characterised by a lavish use of gold, blue and red colours. Figures are opulent with sharp chins and nose and an eye projecting into space. The colours of these paintings are no doubt striking but they give an impression of puritanical frostiness. This is a characteristic of the mercantile community which patronised this art. In the 15th and 16th centuries, the harshness of the Jain style was mellowed in the paintings which developed in central India. While red and blue colours continued to be used, figures acquired a supple grace and softness. In the early 16th century, the Moslem kings of Mandu in Malwa employed Persian artists who illustrated a book on cookery and the poet Saadi's *Bostan*. They very possibly influenced the work of Hindu artists working in the Jain style."

"Now tell me how the art of painting developed under the Mughal kings?"

"As you know, Islam does not favour painting of the human figure. On account of this ban, the art of painting did not develop in the court of the Pathan kings of Delhi—the Slaves, the Tughlaqs and the Lodhis who ruled northern India for about three centuries. It was a singularly sterile period in Indian history and the sole occupation of these kings and their nobles was the building of tombs, a large number of which litter the countryside to the south of Delhi. They built these tombs in their lifetime taking no risks of postponement, as they genuinely apprehended that their successors might not take sufficient interest in these projects of self-glorification. The Mughal painting had its origin in Humayun's visit to the court of Shah Tahmasp of Persia, who was a great patron of art. In 1550 Humayun invited two Persian artists, Mir Sayyid Ali and Abdus Samad, to Delhi. Humayun had a very unsettled rule. In fact it was his son, Akbar (1556–1605), a broad-minded monarch, who fostered the new art of painting by bringing together Persian and Hindu artists. Thus developed a school of painting, Indian in spirit. In the period 1567–1582 Akbar's artists prepared illustrations of the *Hamza Nama*, the romance of Amir Hamza, an uncle of the prophet. These paintings are on cotton cloth and are characterised by wild energy and restlessness. The blossoming trees and rich patterns of carpets and pavilions indicate Persian influence. Later on, the artists of Akbar illustrated the Hindu epics, the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*. These paintings were done on paper."

"Was any painting done in south India in the 16th and early 17th centuries?"

"While painting was vigorously going on in the court of Delhi, it was also encouraged by the Muslim kings of Bijapur, Golconda and Ahmednagar in the Deccan. Ibrahim Adalshah II (1580-1626) of Bijapur was an enthusiastic patron of art. Painting in Golconda was largely influenced by the Persian style."

"Was the patronage of artists continued by the successors of Akbar?"

"Jahangir (1605-27), Akbar's son, continued to patronise artists. He was, however, more interested in portraiture and paintings of court life. His chief interest was natural history, and he encouraged his artists to draw rare birds, animals and flowers. Painting continued under Shah Jahan (1628-58), though his preference was for architecture. The miniatures of this period are characterised by fine line-work, embellishment, and pompousness."

"How did painting develop in Rajasthan and the Punjab hills?"

"Shah Jahan was succeeded by his son Aurangzeb (1658-1707), a devout Muslim who discouraged all arts, including painting. At that time took place the dispersal of artists trained in the Mughal style to the Rajput States of Rajputana. The Mewar State in Rajputana had an old tradition of its own painting, rather crude with bold and daring use of bright colours. It is very likely that some artists came to Basohli, Nurpur as well as other Rajput States of the Punjab hills in the middle of the 17th century. Thus arose the Basohli school of painting characterised by the use of bright red, yellow and blue pigments. Basohli figures have pointed almond-like eyes, receding foreheads, and trees drawn from imagination. This art, rather naive, fierce and passionate, continued for about a century, in most of the Punjab and Jammu hill States."

"You were talking about the paintings of the Kangra school. When did this style originate in the hills and how do you distinguish the Kangra paintings from the Mughal paintings?"

"The Mughal style, originally characterised by fierce energy and crowded animated figures mellowed down in the reign of pleasure-loving Mohammed Shah (1720-48). In 1739 the Persian marauder Nadir Shah invaded India and sacked Delhi. This led to the exodus of certain Hindu artists, trained in the Mughal style, from Delhi and Lahore. They came to Guler, Jammu and also possibly to Nurpur, and developed the Kangra style. At Guler they found an enthusiastic patron in Raja Govardhan Chand (1744-73) who encouraged them. About 1790 Sansar Chand became the paramount ruler of the Kangra hills. Some of the talented artists from Guler sought his patronage and produced some very fine series of paintings."

"You have not answered my question about the distinctive features of the Mughal and Kangra paintings? How do you distinguish a late Mughal painting from a Kangra painting?"

"The Mughal paintings from the early 18th century are characterised by oval faces. On the other hand the Kangra artists evolved new facial formulae

for the representation of ideal female beauty. They introduced into their paintings the lovely landscape of the Punjab hills with their groves of trees and gently flowing streams. Compared with them the Mughal paintings are less interesting, for they depict the flat, monotonous plains of northern India. The Kangra art is religious in nature, and the fountain-source of its inspiration was the Radha-Krishna cult which inspired enchanting poetry in Sanskrit and Hindi from the 13th to the 17th centuries. It is this poetry which found visual expression in the art of Kangra, which explains its romantic loveliness."

"How is it that most people are familiar with the term Mughal painting and so few have heard about the Kangra painting?"

"Most people are familiar with the term Mughal painting for the Mughal emperors figured so prominently in Indian history, while Kangra and its rulers are not known even to the people of the Punjab plains. Moreover the British rulers who regarded themselves as successors of the Mughals, took a good deal of interest in the Mughal painting. All miniatures were at one time indiscriminately given the label of the Mughal school. We owe the discovery of the Kangra painting to Dr Ananda K. Coomaraswamy, a Ceylonese scholar who distinguished these paintings from the Mughal paintings in 1910."

"Look at these beautiful paintings," said I, handing to him the loveliest of them all, from the collection which I was examining. He turned over the paintings quickly as if he was shuffling a pack of cards. He was absolutely unmoved by their beauty, and showing them to him seemed like playing music to a buffalo! We were glad that he soon left after sipping a cup of tea, and the happy atmosphere was restored.

From this incident I realised that to appreciate an art is in some cases more a question of temperament. Some people enjoy thrillers and tales of murders and bloodshed which I find too horrible even to touch. Some people like the terrible in art which stirs their passions. So much of early European art is soaked in the horror of crucifixion. There is plenty of suffering in the world and we need not be reminded of it every day. That is why I prefer to see paintings which proclaim the joy of love, life, and human happiness.

## The Abode of Light

**N**URPUR WAS THE capital of an ancient Rajput State which embraced the entire area, now included in Nurpur tehsil, Pathankot and Shahpur Kandi in Gurdaspur and Lakhanpur to the west of Ravi in Jammu.

Its ancient name was Dhameri, derived from the *audumbara* tree, which is commonly found in this part of the country. Raja Basu (1580–1613) built a fort on a plateau of sandstone with precipitous cliffs on three sides. He was a lover of trees and planted a garden of mangoes at Maukot, which is still called the Raja's Garden. He also built a temple dedicated to Krishna, of which remains only the lower portion, decorated with the carvings of Krishna and the milk-maids. In the ruins of the fort is a temple decorated with wall paintings illustrating anecdotes from the *Bhagavata Purana*. The doors are elegantly painted with figures of women. The image of Krishna in black marble is said to have been brought from Chittor where it was said to have been worshipped by the princess Mira Bai.

Nurpur is a small town, which can by no means be called prosperous. When it was ruled by the Rajas, a number of Kashmiri weavers and merchants had settled there. They manufactured pashmina shawls and this cottage industry was responsible for the prosperity of the town in those days.

Baron Hugel, the Austrian traveller, passed through Nurpur in 1835. Even the austere Baron could not help admiring the beauty of the women of Nurpur. He thus recalls the fleeting vision of a Nurpur beauty: "I was pleased with the beauty of a young Hindu female, who was walking on the flat roof of one of the houses, wrapped in a splendid gold embroidered veil, and glittering with the golden ornaments in her ears and on her arms. Her black hair, according to the fashion of the country, was perfectly plain, but arranged in a knot behind, and confined to the forehead by a small ornament of gold."\* After leaving the town he came to the place where his tent was to be pitched. He found no sign of the tent and the person,

\* Hugel, C., *Travels in Kashmir and the Punjab*, p. 58.

charged with the superintendence of tent-pitching was missing. When he went in search of him, he spied him in some bushes nearby, engaged in a very animated discourse with one of the fair ones of Nurpur. Hugel forgave him, for he found the man's good taste as conspicuous as his negligence, for the woman very fully bore out the renowned personal beauty of the women of her country. He was, however, sorry to disturb a conference which appeared to be mutually interesting.

Nurpur, 'the abode of light' derives its name from Nuruddin, 'the light of the faith', the name of Jahangir. This fact is thus recorded by Jahangir in his autobiography: "Since Raja Basu built the fort and made houses and gardens they call it Nurpur, after my name. About Rs. 30,000 were expended on the building. Certes, the buildings the Hindus construct after their fashion, however much they decorate them, are not pleasant. As the place was fit and the locality enchanting, I ordered them to spend Rs. 1,00,000 out of the public treasury, and to erect buildings at it, and to make lofty edifices suited to the spot."

The visit of Jahangir was during the rule of Jagat Singh (1619-1646). Jahangir was accompanied by his wife Nur-Jahan, 'the light of the world'. It is said that the Mughal Empress was so fascinated by the place and its picturesque location that she asked her husband to build a palace for her. A site was selected on a ridge opposite the fort and Raja Jagat Singh who had invited the royal couple started building a palace. However, Jagat Singh was not at all happy at the prospect of living under the shadow of the Great Mughal. When Nur Jahan went to inspect the building work, she found that nearly all the masons and coolies had bulging lumps of flesh hanging from their necks. When she saw such a large assemblage of goitred men and women and inquired the reason, she was told that it was the effect of the water and climate of Nurpur. The stratagem of Jagat Singh succeeded and the Empress stopped the building operations and proceeded with her husband to Kashmir. The remains of the unfinished palace are still pointed out by the residents of Nurpur.

Jagat Singh was the most distinguished ruler of Nurpur. He was a terror to his neighbours and waged wars against them for many years. He conquered Basohli from Bhupat Pal. In 1623 he conquered Chamba and ruled the state for twenty years. The Mughal Emperor Shah Jahan confirmed him as *mansabdar* of 3,000 infantry and 2,000 horses. He became so confident of his power that in 1640 he revolted against Shah Jahan and strengthened the forts of Maukot, Tara Garh and Nurpur. The Mughal army conquered Nurpur and Maukot, and Jagat Singh took refuge in Tara Garh, a fort built on a conical hill with deep ravines on all three sides which was regarded as invincible. Here again he was pursued by the Mughal army. It was a keenly contested battle, and as the Mughal historian describes, "Many of the besiegers tasted the *sherbat* of martyrdom, and a few beautified the cheeks of valour with the cosmetic of wounds."

After his defeat Jagat Singh again became a trusted general of Shah Jahan. He was sent on an expedition against the Uzbeks in Badakhshan. He led an army of 14,000 Rajputs, and won great renown. Gambhir Rai, the Nurpur bard celebrated the exploits of Jagat Singh in his rhapsodies which are still sung at festivals. "Jagata Raja, the devotee Raja, son of Bas Dev, conquered the country beyond the Indus. He pitched his camp on the snow mountains, and measured the heavens: therefore he was called Jagata says Gambhir Rai." The conquest of Badakhshan brought great fame to the Rajputs. Elphinstone thus pays tribute to Jagat Singh and his soldiers: "The spirit of the Rajputs never shone more brilliantly than in such unusual duty. They stormed mountain passes, made forced marches over snow, constructed redoubts by their own labour, the Raja himself taking an axe like the rest, and bore up against the tempests of that frozen region as firmly as against the fierce and repeated attacks of the Uzbeks."

Jagat Singh was succeeded by Rajrup Singh (1646-1661), who enjoyed the patronage of Shah Jahan and Aurangzeb. Rajrup Singh was succeeded by Mandhata (1661-1700), who also served under Aurangzeb like his father. The next Raja Dayadhata ruled from 1700 to 1735.

From this account a close link is evident between the Mughal Emperors and the Rajas of Nurpur. It is quite possible that Jagat Singh developed an interest in painting. It is very likely that like Basohli, Nurpur may also have been one of the early centres of painting in the primitive style which has been named after Basohli. Paintings from Nurpur in the primitive hill style are quite distinct from those of Basohli.

When Kangra art was born at Guler during the reign of Govardhan Chand, Prithvi Singh was the Raja of Nurpur. He had a long rule from 1735 to 1789. During this period Mughal power was in the throes of dissolution, and in 1752 the Punjab was ceded by the Mughal Emperor to the Afghan, Ahmad Shah Durrani. Durrani could not establish control over the Punjab as the Sikhs under the missals were asserting themselves. In 1770 Jassa Singh Ramgarhia made Nurpur and Kangra his tributaries. In 1775 the supremacy of hill States passed to Jai Singh Kanheya who retained it till 1786. In 1786 Nurpur became a tributary to Sansar Chand, who established himself as the supreme ruler of the Kangra Valley. Though the conditions in the plains were far from stable, Nurpur enjoyed comparative peace. This is borne out by the account of the traveller Forster who visited Nurpur in 1783. He states: "Nurpur enjoyed a state of more internal quiet, was less molested by the Sikhs and governed more equitably than any of the adjacent territories." Painting in Kangra style at Nurpur developed during the long and peaceful rule of Prithvi Singh.

Bir Singh (1789-1846), the last ruling chief of Nurpur, had an eventful though an unfortunate career. Maharaja Ranjit Singh had established himself as monarch of the Punjab plains and he was rapidly extending his power to the hills. On some pretext or the other, he was making a short

shrift of the hill Rajas, and Bir Singh could not escape the inevitable. On his failure to attend a conference which Ranjit Singh had summoned at Sialkot in the autumn of 1815, he was called upon to pay a fine of Rs. 40,000. He parted with all his savings, and sold his family idols and sacrificial vessels of silver and gold, but even this did not suffice to make up the fine. He was asked to hand over his State and to accept a jagir. He was a very proud and self-respecting man, and refused the offer of a jagir and escaped into Chamba territory where his people rallied round him. He and his hill-men were defeated by the Sikh army, and he fled in disguise and reached Arki, a small State near Simla where he lived for ten years.

In 1826 Bir Singh returned to Nurpur in disguise and laid siege to Nurpur Fort. Ranjit Singh sent a force under Desa Singh Majithia, and Bir Singh fled to Chamba. The Raja of Chamba, Charhat Singh surrendered him to Ranjit Singh who kept him confined to Gobind Garh Fort at Amritsar for seven years. Bir Singh's wife was the sister of Charhat Singh, and resided with her brother. At her solicitation, and in remorse for his own conduct, Charhat Singh ransomed his brother-in-law at the price of Rs. 85,000. After his release Bir Singh lived for some time in Chamba.

Vigne, the English traveller, met Bir Singh at Chamba. He thus records his impressions of this tragic figure: "I visited poor Bir Singh at Chamba, and found him in a large building on the south side of the town. His anxiety to regain possession of his dominions was evident in every sentence that he uttered; and he continued to relate the history of his misfortunes, and to request my assistance, although I assured him over and over again that I was not an employee, either of the king or of the East India Company. 'Reinstate me at Nurpur,' he exclaimed; 'promise me that you will not interfere in my domestic affairs, and I will do anything to show my gratitude to the English, and commence by making a wide road for them throughout my dominions.' "\*"

Mr. Barnes refers to another offer of a jagir of Rs. 25,000 yearly value about this time. The offer was made through Raja Dhian Singh of Jammu, Prime Minister of the Sikh kingdom. "Dhian Singh had a *sanad* or patent in his possession duly signed and sealed, under the sign manual of the Maharaja, and, before making it over, he wished to extort from Bir Singh the coveted salutation of 'Jaidaya' due to a ruling chief, the offering of which by Bir Singh would have been an acknowledgement of Dhian Singh's regal status and of his own inferiority. This he refused to do. He was a Raja by hereditary right, while Dhian Singh held the title only by favour of Ranjit Singh, and the proud Rajput would not compromise his honour even for the sake of affluence, nor accord a salutation that would have involved a degradation of himself in the eyes of the brotherhood. He had, therefore, to retire again into exile. He took up his residence at the Damthal *ashram*, which

\* Vigne, G.T. *Travels in Kashmir, Ladak and Iskardo*, Vol. I, p. 158.

provided sanctuary to fugitives, while his Rani and infant son continued to reside in Chamba on an allowance from the Raja of Rs. 500 a month." In 1845, when the Sikh army was defeated by the British in the First Sikh War, Bir Singh made a last effort to regain his kingdom, and again laid siege to the Nurpur Fort. However, already enfeebled by many years of suffering and privation, he died before the walls of the fort. He stands as a symbol of Rajput valour and stubbornness.

We had a good look at Nurpur and its paintings. On account of extensive erosion, the soil of Nurpur hills is barren, and the landscape is bleak. Even drinking water is available with difficulty and a bath is an expensive luxury. Hence, Nurpur is not a place where you can linger for long. So we decided to move to Nagrota.

On the way to Nagrota about a mile from Kotla is a watering spot where drivers of trucks and lorries stop for cooling the radiators of their vehicles, and the travellers quench their thirst from a wayside spring. Adjoining the spring is a cave temple. There are huge boulders at the entrance of the temple, some of which have been carved in the shape of elephants. They had been deprived of their snouts by some iconoclast. From underneath the arch of the bridge we had a view of the *Khad* and the light green translucent leaves of shisham trees appeared most attractive.

In the lime-stone cave stalactites of lime are worshipped as 'lingams' of Shiva. Water saturated with lime continues to trickle from the roof. As I entered the cave I saw a Sadhu with a long beard, flowing locks of hair touching his shoulders, and magnetic eyes seated before the lingam absorbed in contemplation (Fig. 8). It was an inspiring sight, almost reminiscent of a Roerich painting. I thought it was a sacrilege to disturb the mystic trance of the Sadhu, and silently withdrew.



## Medicine of the Evening

**A**N UNTIDY TOWN with a sprawling bazaar—this was Nagrota, a colony of Kayasthas who came as scribes to the Kangra Valley and slowly rose to a position of eminence in the courts of the Rajas. With the rise of Sikh power they served as accountants for land revenue. When the British rule came to the hills, because of their education, they soon occupied most of the soft jobs. How nondescript a town is, it does not matter. As soon as there is some link with it in the form of friendship with some person, it acquires importance in one's personal geography. I had one such link with Nagrota in the person of Bishamber Dass Kayastha who was one of my companions in my search for paintings, and he was helpful in locating some important collections.

When we reached Nagrota it was already late for lunch, but our hosts insisted that we must have tea with them. Indian sweets, biscuits, and pastries covered the table. We were famished, having missed lunch, and ate heartily. While we were having tea two Gaddi boys entertained us with their folk songs. One of the boys sang, while his companion played on a flute (Fig. 9). How sweet and gentle are the songs of the Gaddis! In them we breathe the pine-scented air of the hills and hear the murmur of hill streams. Their love songs are full of tender feelings expressed with freedom and lack of restraint, which are characteristics of this pastoral community.

Listening to the songs we hardly realised that the sun had set. From behind the mountain, rose the full moon with a brilliance seen only in the pure atmosphere of the Himalayas. We asked leave of our hosts but they insisted that we have dinner with them. Archer was feeling restless and suggested that we move on to Palampur. I understood the cause of his uneasiness. After sunset he must have his peg of whisky. This was almost a ritual with him. Our hosts did not realise that he required seclusion for sipping his 'Medicine of the Evening' as we had named it. They had made elaborate preparation for a dinner and did not like to be disappointed. Indian hospitality is truly overwhelming, and it was difficult to decline it.

Kayastha came to me very much perturbed on learning about our preparation to leave Nagrota.

"Why is the Saheb so anxious to leave?"

"Don't you realise that an English gentleman must have his whisky after sunset? This is the weakness which we Sikhs of the Punjab have in common with the British."

"You are a Sikh, but I have never seen you drinking."

"I am a different type of Sikh. If I take alcohol I get a headache. People take alcohol for stimulation and I feel intoxicated without it, and feel no need for any artificial stimulus. The English, however, live in a cold climate like our hill-men and they must warm themselves with alcoholic drinks. In England it is as rare to see Englishmen drink water as it is to see a Mohammedan eat a slice of ham. In fact, an Englishman who drinks water would lose caste like a Hindu who eats beef!"

"Has India been as much prohibition-conscious in the past as it is now?"

"Ancient India was by no means a holy land full of dreary monks. In fact, in the Sanskrit literature of the Vedic period we see glimpses of a full-blooded people, the Aryans, enjoying a fermented drink called *soma*, and the company of women. *Soma* was drunk at sacrifices, and there are a number of hymns eulogising it. Here is one in which the exhilaration felt by a worshipper of Indra, who had a liberal dose of *soma* is described:

"*Like wild winds*

*The draughts have raised me up.*

*In my glory I have passed beyond the sky*

*and the great earth. Have I been drinking soma?"*

"If the ancient Hindus were a puritanical people like the Jainas they would not have venerated Vatsyayana, the author of the *Kama Sutra*, as a sage. They considered the life of the senses as necessary as the worship of their gods. The writings of Kalidasa are full of sensuous charm, and the society which he depicts is a pleasure-loving one. Courtesans like Vasantasena were held in high esteem and some of them kept wine shops in gardens and doled out *sura* liquor to their admirers from the windows of their shops which were decorated with flowers."

"What about the ancient Punjab?"

"The people of the ancient Punjab were called Bahikas. A traveller, a Bahika, who had come to the Kuru country somewhere near the present Kurukshetra and Karnal felt home-sick and sang the following song about the women of his country: 'Though a Bahika, I am at present an exile in the Kuru country; that tall and fair-complexioned wife of mine, dressed in her fine blanket, certainly remembers me when she retires to rest. Oh! when shall I go back to my country crossing again the Satadru (Sutlej) and the Iravati (Ravi) and see the beautiful females of fair complexion, wearing stout bangles, dressed in blankets and skins, eye-sides coloured with the dye of *manshila*, forehead, cheek and chin painted with collyrium? When shall we eat under the pleasant shade of the *shami*, *peelu* and *karir*, loaves and balls of fried barley with churned curd and gathering strength, take away the

clothes of the wayfarers and beat them?" How true it sounds even of the present-day Majha districts of Lahore and Amritsar."

"When did the change in the attitude of the people come?"

"It largely came after the Muslim occupation of India. Ibn Batuta, the Moroccan who visited India during the period 1325-54, states: 'The Hindus did not drink wine, for this in their eyes was the greatest of vices. Any Muslim who drank it was punished with 80 stripes and shut up for three months in a *metamore* which was opened only at the hours of meals.' A change came in the Muslim society too with the Mughals. Babur, the first Mughal emperor, was addicted to wine. He not only drank, but regaled his Turk nobles with goblets of wine. Akbar drank wine mixed with opium. Jahangir was heavily addicted to spirits and it was with great difficulty that his queen, Nur Jahan, restricted him to nine cup-fulls."

"It was not only the Englishmen and the Mughals who enjoyed alcoholic drinks, the Punjab peasants, particularly the Sikhs, regard drinking as one of the greatest pleasures of life."

"This is true. In fact, if country liquor is not offered along with curried meat, hospitality is regarded as incomplete."

"This habit among the Punjab peasantry has a long tradition behind it. Speaking of Ranjit Singh, the most vigorous ruler Punjab had produced, Fane, a nephew of Sir Henry Fane, the Commander-in-Chief of India, writes: 'The liquor he drinks would kill most people in a week, being, I should imagine, considerably stronger than spirits of wine; so much so as to bring tears into our eyes, even with the smallest quantity; and yet, during our different visits he seldom drank less than several small glasses full and without any apparent effect.'"

Having so fully explained the genuine craving an English gentleman has for whisky and the innocence of this pleasure, our hosts were left in no doubt of its necessity. Hill-men themselves are not averse to country liquor and in fact were warmly appreciative and sympathetic. Their only grievance was that I should have told them earlier, so that this occasion for unhappiness may not have arisen at all. They placed at our disposal two secluded rooms, one of which I gave to Archer and Anand and the other I occupied.

After lying on the bed for a while I got rid of the fatigue of the journey and seeing my companions in a happy mood I left for the open fields adjoining the house from where a good view of the mountains could be had. Moonlight does spread magic on snow-covered peaks. I sat on a stone almost for an hour gazing at the white Dhauladhar. Watching the mountains I felt peaceful and there was no more the restlessness that plagues over-sensitive and high-strung people like me. In such situations one is face to face with the Eternal and the Mysterious. My companion Kayastha sat at a distance. I was glad that he did not make any attempt to talk, and realised that in the silence of contemplation, speech was sacrilege. It is at

moments like these that one realizes the truth of the remark of a Japanese nature mystic, that the appreciation of silence is the highest of aesthetics. I enjoyed the quiet of the mountains and sank into a reverie which was disturbed only by the call for dinner.

## A Fort and a Temple

I RECEIVED AN INVITATION for a trip to the Kangra Valley from an unexpected quarter in the last week of March wife, Professor John Kenneth Galbraith, the American Ambassador in Delhi, sent a message, asking if I could accompany him to the Valley and show him the places connected with Kangra painting. On meeting him I learnt that during the tense period of November 1962, when the Chinese had invaded NEFA in the Eastern Himalayas, he happened to read my books on Kangra painting and became an ardent admirer of this art. March is the month when snow is on the mountains and flowers are abundant in the Kangra Valley. I readily accepted the invitation.

Our party consisted of seven persons—the Ambassador and his wife, their two sons, his Private Secretary O’Neil and his wife, and Dr B.P. Pal. Leaving Delhi at seven in the morning by the Ambassador’s plane we were in Pathankot in two hours. On our way we had an aerial view of Chandigarh, the new capital of Punjab, the Govindsagar lake at Bhakra Dam, and of the Shiwalik mountains. By 10 a.m. we were at Nurpur where we saw the murals in the temple and had lunch in the Forest Rest House. In the afternoon we were on the road to Kangra and reached there two hours before sunset. We sailed so smoothly in the Cadillac that we did not feel any fatigue, and hardly realised that we were motoring in the mountains. After depositing our luggage in the Travellers’ Rest House we jeeped to the Fort where a crowd of officials and citizens of Kangra town had assembled to give us a welcome.

Six feet eight inches in height, Galbraith is an impressive figure. In India we admire tall people, and the hill people were delighted to see him. He helped India during the war with China. He took a personal interest in the aid projects. In fact, no other American ambassador enjoyed such popularity with Indians as Galbraith did, and they regarded him as a sincere friend and benefactor. The educated people in India respect learning and authorship and some of the officials who had read Galbraith’s *The Affluent Society* were glad to see him in person. Above all, he is warm-hearted and finds real joy in mixing with people. The Gaddi shepherds dressed in their

traditional kilts entertained us with a dance. Galbraith joined them and soon picked up the rhythm of the dance. The Gaddis beamed with joy, having such a distinguished person as a participant in their dance. The people of Kangra, who had never before seen such informality, were delighted.

When the dance was over we decided to explore the Fort which was the seat of power of the Rajas of Kangra from ancient times. It is said to have been founded by an ancestor of the Katoch Rajas, Susarman, who was an ally of the Kauravas in the battle of Mahabharata. Built on a precipitous cliff overhanging the Banganga and Manjhi rivers, the Fort enjoys a picturesque location. Though in ruins it still dominates the Valley and creates an impression of power. It is accessible only by a narrow strip of land and is protected by a series of gates named after its conquerors—Jahangir, Ranjit Singh, and the British. After passing through the gates we reached the innermost courtyard where once stood the palace of the Rajas, which is now in ruins. The courtyard contains the temples of Lakshmi Narayan and Ambika Devi and a small Jain temple with a stone image of Adinath. Covering the ruins with their giant umbrellas are banyan trees, probably very old. To the north is the snow-covered Dhauladhar and to the west on an escarpment is the temple of Jayanti Devi. With the development of modern artillery, forts have lost their importance and remain merely picturesque reminders of the feudal past. After the British occupation of the Valley, the Fort remained neglected for a long time and was a favourite haunt of young lovers of Kangra, till it came under the management of the Archaeological Department which closes the gates before sunset.

The Kangra Fort had its full share of the vicissitudes of the history of north India. Mahmud Ghazni conquered it in A.D. 1009 on his fourth expedition. It was then known as Bhima Nagar after Bhima the Pandava. Mohammed Tughlak conquered it in 1337. Badri-Chach, the Moslem historian, thus describes the Fort in flamboyant rhetoric: "It is placed between two rivers like the pupil of an eye, and it has so preserved its honour and is so impregnable that neither Sikandar nor Dara was able to take it. Within are the masters of the mangonels. Within also are beauties resplendent as the sun. Its chiefs are all strong as buffaloes with necks like those of rhinoceros. Its inhabitants are all travelling on the high road to hell and perdition and are *ghuls* resembling dragons."\* Ma'asir-ul-Umara, the historian of Shah Jahan, who was a more accurate observer with predilection for measurements, thus describes it: "The fort is situated on the summit of a high mountain; it is extremely strong and possesses 23 bastions and seven gateways. The interior circumference is one *kos* and 15 chains, the length, one-fourth of a *kos* plus two chains, the width, between 15 and 25 chains, its height,

\* Hutchison and Vogel, J.P., *History of the Punjab Hill States* (Lahore, 1924), Vol. I, p. 126.

114 cubits. Within the Fort are two large tanks. It was destined to fall into the hands of the mighty army of the Emperor Jahangir, under the influence of whose prosperous star all difficulties were overcome, and all obstacles removed."\*

In January 1662 Jahangir visited the valley via Siba and Guler. He was so fascinated by the beauty of the Valley that he desired to build a summer residence there. The foundations of a palace were actually laid in village Gagri, close to Kangra. The work was abandoned, as later he preferred Kashmir.

The Fort remained in the possession of the Mughals till 1783. Jai Singh Kanheya, a Sikh chieftain captured it from Saifullah Khan, the last Mughal Governor, in 1783, and it remained in his possession for four years. Jai Singh surrendered the Fort to Sansar Chand in exchange for some territory in the plains of Pathankot. With the occupation of the Fort, Sansar Chand became the supreme ruler of the Kangra Valley. In 1809 he was forced to surrender it to Ranjit Singh in return for the aid given in expelling Gurkha invaders.

Apart from the Fort, the ancient town of Nagarkot was known for its temple of Vajreshwari Devi, its fragrant rice, its delicious sugar prepared from a local variety of sugar-cane, as well as for the 'manufacture' of noses and treatment of eye diseases. Plastic surgery is not the achievement of western medical science. The history of Kangra shows that operations for the restoration of noses and ears were performed for centuries at Kangra. In fact the name Kangra is derived from '*kan-gara*' or the ear-shapers. Cutting off of noses, ears and hands was a common form of punishment meted out to criminals, particularly thieves, during the rule of the Mughals and Sikhs. Enraged husbands even now take revenge on their faithless wives by cutting off their noses to spite their beauty. Vigne, the English traveller, records that people came to Kangra even from Persia to seek new noses. He thus describes the method of performing the operation: "I learned that they first give the patient a sufficient quantity of opium, bhang or wine to render him senseless, they then tap the skin of the forehead above the nose, until a sort of blister rises, from which a piece of skin of the proper shape is then cut and immediately applied as a nose, sewed on and supported with pieces of cotton. The wound is then dressed with an ointment in which blue vitriol is an ingredient. The surgeons practised on the credulity of the Hindus, by telling them that all that is done is by favour of the Devi or spirit who is featureless, and the operation would succeed nowhere else, but at Kot Kangra. On my way to and from the place I saw several persons who had been operated on, and were returning homewards, looking quite proud of their new acquisition, which was, however, but a sorry substitute for the old feature."\*\*

\**Ibid*, p. 116.

\*\* Vigne, G.T., *Travels in Kashmir, Ladak, Iskardo...and the Himalaya*, (London 1842), Vol. I, p. 141.

The people of Kangra, however, had a high opinion of the art of nose-making and if we could judge from one of their folksongs they were not at all worried, if they lost their organ of smell.

Soonana tree, soonana tree, O soonana tree,  
 With the boiled rice we eat cooked soonana pods.  
 Their spiciness made us sneeze.  
 We will get our noses cut,  
 We will go to Kangra to have new noses made for us.  
 Soonana tree, soonana tree, O soonana tree.

The descendants of the nose surgeons are called Kangheras, but they no longer practise the ancient art.

Vajreshwari Devi is held in great esteem by the Hindu worshippers of Shakti, the supreme power of God. Like the Fort, the temple also attracted the attention of the invaders, who repeatedly destroyed it. As soon as the despoilers disappeared from the scene, the Rajas of Kangra rebuilt it. On account of the offerings of countless pilgrims the Vajreshwari temple became fabulously rich. Rumours about its enormous hoards of gold and silver excited the avarice of Mahmud Ghazni who plundered and destroyed it in 1009. After the departure of Mahmud, the Hindu Raja built the temple again in 1043. In 1337 it was plundered and destroyed by Mohammed Tughlak. It was re-built by Maharaja Sansar Chand I in 1440. Khamas Khan, a General of Sher Shah Suri destroyed the temple again in 1540. In the tolerant reign of Akbar, the temple was restored, and Akbar offered a miniature gold umbrella to the Devi. Sardar Desa Singh Majithia, Sikh Governor of Kangra, rebuilt the temple in the Sikh style, and Rani Chand Kaur got its bulbous dome covered with a coating of gold-plate. Maharaja Ranjit Singh visited the temple twice. On one occasion he offered a miniature image of solid gold, in which he is shown wearing drawers, paying homage to the Devi. This image is kept in the treasury of the temple. The temple was completely destroyed on April 4, 1905, by an earthquake which razed the town of Kangra, and caused enormous damage in the Valley. It was rebuilt in its present form in 1920.

The temple is approached through a winding bazaar. The shops are stocked with rosaries, sacred threads, incense of many varieties, brass utensils and miniature images of the Devi. On the walls of the entrance gate are murals of Durga painted by Gulabu Ram. In front of the temple is a pavilion supported by carved stone pillars and contains a marble stone on which special oaths are inscribed. It is said that some of the pilgrims used to cut off their tongues as an offering to the Devi. Abul Fazal, the Minister and biographer of Akbar, thus describes this custom: "Nagarkot is a city situated upon a mountain with a fort called Kangra. In the vicinity of this city upon a lofty mountain is a place, Maha Mai, which they consider as one of the works of the divinity and come in pilgrimage to it from great distances, thereby obtaining the accomplishment of their wishes. It is most wonderful



that in order to effect this they cut out their tongues, which grow again in the course of two or three days, and some times in a few hours."

The practice of offering tongues to the Devi is far from extinct even now. During my stay at Kangra, a Jat farmer from Rohtak cut off his tongue and offered it to the Devi. He bled profusely and was practically dumb for a long time. Of all the organs of the human body, the tongue possesses the greatest regenerative power and some growth does take place, and the credulous pilgrims ascribe it to the grace of the goddess.

The temple looks very attractive when viewed against the background of the snow-covered Dhauladhar. After enjoying the sight of the Dhauladhar and the green valley from the Mission Hospital, we decided to see some specimens of Kangra art. Mr Man Chandra Uppal, an advocate of the place and the obliging Tehsildar collected all the paintings which the town of Kangra still retains. A *mahant* of the Vajreshwari temple brought two paintings both badly framed and covered with layers of dust. In one of these an *Abhisarika Nayika* was shown, and in the other, the legend of Krishna lifting the mountain Govardhan. Both these paintings appear to have been painted at the close of the 19th century. An old widow had five paintings of the Hindu gods rather crudely drawn. She sent four specimens with the message that she would not accept less than Rs. 500 each. The only worth-while Kangra paintings in Kangra itself were in the possession of Man Chandra Uppal. He had ten paintings of Tantrik goddesses as well as an illuminated and illustrated manuscript of Durga all of which were in the late Kangra style. These he had received as fees from Kanwar Kharginder Chand, the third son of Raja Narinder Chand of Nadaun.

After exploring Kangra town, the discovery dawned upon me that Kangra art has very little to do with the town. There are historical reasons for this. It was during the rule of Dalip Singh, from 1661-95, and Govardhan Chand that Kangra art was born at Guler. It was fostered by Parkash Chand (1773-1790) who succeeded Govardhan Chand. From 1790 onwards it enjoyed the patronage of Maharaja Sansar Chand at Tira Sujanpur, Nadaun and Alampur. During the entire period Kangra remained in the hands of the Mughals no painting was done at Kangra itself. The town of Kangra lends its name to the District as well as the Valley, though the District headquarters are at Dharamsala and Kangra is only a tehsil, and it also does so graciously to the pictorial art of the Valley. \*

After the discovery that Kangra art was not practised in Kangra itself, but in the outlying towns of Guler, Tira Sujanpur, Alampur and Nadaun, I decided to contact the living artists of the Valley. The Tehsildar sent for Gulabu Ram and Lachhman Dass from Samloti who still carry on their ancient profession. Samloti is a picturesque village about five miles from Kangra. Lachhman Dass, a simple hill-man carried in a cloth bundle a large collection of paintings drawn by his ancestors. He described himself as a Guleria Mahratta and it was three generations ago that his ancestors

migrated from Guler to Samloti. Hazuri who met Mr French in his travels was the father of Lachhman Dass. Lachhman Dass possesses a number of sketches by Hazuri. As compared with the old masters, the line is weak. It seems Hazuri was a prolific painter and his services were in considerable demand for portraits and family groups, as photography was still unknown in the Kangra Valley. There is a portrait of a postman with the mail bag hanging from his neck, delivering a letter to a woman. There is another sketch of a clerk of Kangra tehsil, seated on a *charpai* with his father, and his wife, daughter, and a son seated in front. The postman and the tehsil clerk did not pay for the paintings and hence they remained in the possession of Lachhman Dass.

Gulabu Ram is a mural painter who decorated the temple of Vajreshwari Devi with the paintings of Durga, and the dance of Krishna and the milkmaids. He has also decorated village temples at Bandla and Paprola. He is commonly employed by the rich men of Kangra for decorating the interiors of their houses. His work is crude and lacks the refinement for which the Kangra painters were well-known. Another painter in the old style was Lachhman of Rajaul.

The work of these painters represents the last phase of Kangra art. The importance of their work lies mainly in the fact that it illustrates the close of a great art tradition, which languished due to lack of patronage on account of the disappearance of the feudal system. Moreover, they no longer possess that spark of genius which gave such a poetic quality to the works of their ancestors.

We returned to the Travellers' Rest House late at night. Seated in the verandah and watching the fairy revel of fireflies in the valley below, Galbraith and I discussed our day's experience of picture-hunting.

"How do you distinguish a fake from a genuine Kangra painting," asked Galbraith.

"The great paintings from Guler and Kangra have such flawless flowing lines that it is almost impossible to copy them. Drawn with skill and unwavering confidence they provide a contrast with the works of artists of mediocre talent. The line in their paintings is shaky and often broken. I believe the great paintings cannot be copied, even if the faker uses old mineral dyes and ancient hand-made paper. Even if he is a skilful artist, copying of such a painting would take so much time that the cost would be the same as you would pay for a genuine old masterpiece."

"Do the colours provide any clue to the age of the paintings?"

"In the paintings of the 18th century and the first quarter of the 19th century, mineral dyes, which required careful grinding for many months, were used. For blues they used powdered lapis lazuli, for yellows orpiment, for vermilion crude cinnabar and for red *hurmachi* or Indian red. For greens they used powdered verdigris, for white *ccrusite*, and for black *kajal* or lampblack collected from burning oil lamps by hanging a lid over

them. For painting the background and borders of clothes they used gold leaf mixed with gum. From 1840 onwards, after the British occupation of the Punjab hills, aniline dyes came into use. In these later paintings we see the lavish use of indigo blue and green colours. The harsh green of these paintings is different from the mellow green of the early paintings."

"Do the portraits of the Rajas and their Ranis provide any clue to the age of the paintings?"

"Apart from being the record of the physical appearance of the Rajas and their costumes, the style of their portraits provides a clue to the dates of other contemporary miniatures. Their wives were in *purdah* and were never seen by the artists. Hence the portraits of the ladies—whether Ranis or their maid-servants—have the same facial formula for they were all drawn from imagination. The same formula was used by the artists in the portrayal of ideal heroines while illustrating the Sanskrit and Hindi classics. Such portraits in which the Rajas are seen with their women-folk provide valuable clues to the dating of other paintings and in identifying the work of individual artists."

"Now tell me how you distinguish a masterpiece from an ordinary painting."

"When I go through a large collection of paintings some of them make a deep impression on me. In these paintings the artist shows a wonderful command of line and a flawless sense of colour. Such paintings make an immediate impact on me. It is similar to the impression you receive when suddenly you see a beautiful woman. In these paintings there is a sense of joy and an atmosphere of cheerfulness. On seeing them one spontaneously exclaims 'How sweet!' On the other hand the inferior paintings leave me unmoved."

"I feel your method of seeing paintings is correct. I remember I was once given an assignment in which I had to deal with aeroplanes and I knew nothing about them. I was told that if you stand before an aeroplane and it looks good it is a good plane. I found that this test worked."

"The same test applies to human beings also. As a District Magistrate I had to meet a large number of people every day and I could guess their character and motives in a few seconds."

"Any other criterion for judging a good painting?"

"A good painting is just like a good wife. Just as a good woman reveals her qualities slowly and you appreciate her more and more as time passes on, similarly a good painting grows upon you. The more you see it the more you like it. If it has no merit you get tired of it in a few days and would not like to look at it again."

## Temple of the Fire Goddess

**I**T WAS STILL dark when we left the P.W.D. rest house at Kangra. By the time we crossed the Ban Ganga, the sun had risen behind the Dhauladhar. We had a splendid view of the Kangra fort from across the Ban Ganga, and after admiring the fort we resumed our journey to Jwalamukhi, the temple of the fire goddess. The road is narrow, and winds like the trail of a snake. The railway line was in sight, and a number of pilgrims could be seen on the road. At last we reached Rani Tal, where there is a police post, and on the crest of a hill is the travellers' bungalow, which commands a splendid view of the Dhauladhar to the north and the Valley to the south.

On a hillock close to the bungalow is the tomb of Bawa Fattu, a disciple of Sodhi Gulab Singh, who is said to have given him the power of prophecy. It is said that Fattu by his prayers raised to life Fateh Chand, the brother of Sansar Chand. Fattu is still venerated by the hill people, and to swear by his name is considered a particularly solemn oath. A fair is held at his tomb on the Baisakhi day, to which people come from far off places, with requests of various types. They present written petitions in which they stipulate the offerings they would make if their requests are granted. The priest prays at the tomb while presenting the application on behalf of the pilgrim, and when in due course the wish is fulfilled, the person concerned returns to make the offering. At Lanj in Kangra tehsil, there is another shrine of similar sanctity, dedicated to Bawa Bhupat, where petitions are presented in a similar manner. People, who are too poor to bear the burden of court fees and pleader's charges seek the aid of Bhupat. Aggrieved persons hurry to his tomb and pronounce a curse on their enemies. If sickness, or any other misfortune befalls their victims, they think that it is because of the curse of Bhupat, and they try to make amends, or at least make an attempt for a compromise, a very desirable thing in a countryside afflicted by litigation.

The road to Jwalamukhi was pulverised into fine dust by the heavy pilgrim traffic, a large number of whom could be seen walking on foot

or riding in tongas to the temple of the fire goddess. The dusty road was lined by the children of hillmen begging coins from the pilgrims. Some of them could be seen following the pilgrims for long distances, singing, "*De ja Lala paisa*", tugging at their clothes, and only leaving their victim when a paisa was produced.

At last the holy village of Jwalamukhi was in sight, nestling on the side of the hill. The gilded roof of the temple of the fire goddess was standing out conspicuously among the whitewashed, box-like houses. Before proceeding to Nadaun, we decided to pay homage to the goddess. The site of the temple was discovered by a Brahmin about 800 years ago. It is said that the goddess revealed herself to a South Indian Brahmin devotee, and, directing him to repair to the Kangra hills, told him he would there find tongues of flames arising from the ground at a spot overgrown with trees. The Brahmin obeyed the call, discovered the sacred spot, and erected a temple to the goddess. A long flight of stairs leads to the temple. On both sides of the stairs are shops, in which coconuts, sweets, incense and miniature silver umbrellas are sold. These commodities are purchased by the pilgrims and offered at the temple and are sold back by the priests to the shopkeepers, and thus the offerings continue to shuttle between the temple and the shops. As soon as a pilgrim lands at Jwalamukhi, he is surrounded by priests who trace his ancestors who had ever visited the shrine. The priest provides accommodation to the pilgrim whom he adopts, and guides to the temple. The priests of Jwalamukhi temples are called Bhojkis, the name being derived from *bhojan*, food; their main function is to feed the goddess and incidentally themselves.

Those whose prayers are granted by the Devi, offer miniature umbrellas of silver, as a thanks-offering. The bazar was crowded with pilgrims and it was with great difficulty that we reached the temple, rubbing shoulders with men and women from different parts of Punjab and U.P. We removed our shoes near the entrance gate, and walked bare-footed into the temple. The marble floor was greasy with *halwa*, which the pilgrims bring as an offering to the Devi. Some of the devout pilgrims place *halwa* in the mouth of the stone images of the Devi stuck in the walls. The main temple has a gilded dome, which glitters in the light of the setting sun. Enclosed in the temple are some rocks. Jets of gas issuing from the crevices in these rocks are lighted by the priests with match-sticks, and the blue flames accompanied by explosions excite wonder and awe among the pilgrims. Higher up are a number of minor temples swarming with *sadhus* with matted locks, draped in saffron robes. In the neighbourhood of Jwalamukhi are six mineral springs which contain common salt and iodine in the form of potassium iodide.

Jwalamukhi is said to represent the mouth of the demon Jalandhara. The legend is that Jalandhara, the demon, was crushed to death by a mass of mountains which Shiva placed upon him. The flaming mouth of the

demon was under the upper part of the Doab, which is called Jalandharpith, the area between Baijnath and Dehra, the circuit of which is 96 miles. In this area are situated many famous temples, including the Shiva temple at Baijnath, and Nandi Kesar in Jadrangal, opposite the picturesque bungalow of Dadh. His feet extended to Multan. The legend of the demon Jalandhara remotely refers to the emergence of the mountains of the Kangra Valley from under the Miocene sea, a long arm of which stretched from the present Arabian Sea to Hoshiarpur Shiwaliks. The conquest of the 'Son of the Ocean' Jalandhara by Shiva symbolises the retreat of the ocean and the emergence of the mountains.

Jwalamukhi has been visited by a number of distinguished persons in its chequered history, and one of them was Akbar. A water-course, which takes off from a spring high above, is said to have been constructed by Akbar who tried to quench the flames. The attempt, however, proved futile, and the flames continued to burn with undiminished intensity, and Akbar became a devotee of the goddess and presented a gold *chhatra*. It is said that the gold turned into copper as soon as the Emperor looked back at his gift with pride and thought of the costly present he had made to the goddess.

Jahangir, when he invaded the valley, also saw Jwalamukhi. Unlike his broad-minded father, he had no respect for the religion of the Hindus. On seeing crowds of pilgrims, including some Muslims traversing long distances to pray to the goddess, he was distressed, and stated that "a world has here wandered in the desert of error". He thus records his impression of Jwalamukhi in his *Tuzk*:

"Near the temple, and on the slope of the hill there is a sulphur mine and its heat causes flames to continually burst forth. They call it Jwalamukhi (flaming face or fiery mouth), and regard it as one of the idol's miracles. In fact, Hindus, while knowing the truth, deceive the common people. Hindus say that when the life of Mahadeo's wife came to an end and she drank the draught of death, Mahadeo, in his great love and attachment to her, took her dead body on his back, and went about the world carrying her corpse. When some time had passed in this manner, her form dissolved and dropped asunder and each limb fell in a different place; they give honour and dignity to the place according to the dignity and grace of the member. As the breast, which when compared with other members has the greatest dignity, fell in this place, they hold it more precious than any other. Some maintain that this stone, which is now a place of worship for the vile infidels, is not the stone which was there originally, but that a body of the people of Islam came and carried off the original stone, and threw it into the bottom of the river, with the intent that no one should get at it. The tumult of the infidels and idol-worshippers died away in the world, till a lying Brahmin hid a stone for his own ends, and going to the Raja of the time said: 'I saw Durga in a dream, and she said to me:

They have thrown me into a certain place; quickly go and take me up.' The Raja, in the simplicity of his heart, and greedy for the offerings of gold that would come to him, accepted the tale of the Brahmin, and sent a number of people with him, and brought that stone, and kept it in this place with honour, and started again the shop of error and misleading.'\*

Maharaja Ranjit Singh paid a visit to the temple in 1809. On the invitation of Sansar Chand, Ranjit Singh defeated the Gurkhas and chased them to the left bank of the Sutlej. Sansar Chand received Ranjit Singh at Jwalamukhi, and there in the holy temple Ranjit Singh executed an agreement, stamped with his own hand dyed in saffron. By this agreement, Ranjit Singh took the Kangra Fort and the 66 attached villages, while guaranteeing the hereditary dominions of Sansar Chand. After the successful termination of the Afghan campaign, Ranjit Singh gilded the roof of the temple as a thanks-offering, made abundant offerings of gold and silver, and distributed alms among the poor. It is said that "he hovered round the sacred flames like a moth round a lamp." His son, Kharak Singh, presented a pair of folding doors covered with silver plates, splendidly embossed, which are shown with pride by the priests.

There are no female dancers at Jwalamukhi at present. Baron Hugel who came here in 1835 found more than twenty, fairer and prettier than usual and decked out with lilies. When they made their appearance before his tent-door, he was ungallant enough to send them away unrewarded, in spite of their tender ditties and the bells on the tips of their fingers sounded by them so invitingly.

The road from Jwalamukhi to Nadaun, lined by avenues of mango trees, is very picturesque. After a drive of five miles the river Beas came into view, and on the high bank in front was the town of Nadaun, about which it was said, 'Who will go away, who once comes to Nadaun!' This was due to the fact that after the loss of Kangra to the Mughals, Nadaun was the capital of the Rajas of Kangra and they embellished it with many fine buildings. During the reign of Sansar Chand, apart from masons, carpet makers, goldsmiths and painters, more than two hundred dancing girls lived there, and added to the glamour of the capital by their song, music and good looks.

Before entering Nadaun, we decided to shake off the layers of fine dust, which we had accumulated from Dehra Gopipore onwards. The long flowing beard of our friend, Satyarathi, the collector of folk songs, became so heavily powdered with dust that he looked like a Himalayan sage. He stroked his beard, and combed his long flowing hair. After crossing the river by a boat, we reached the left bank where we were received by Raja Rajindar Singh of Nadaun. We climbed a flight of stairs closely watched by a marriage party. The palanquin of the bride draped in scarlet,

\* Jahangir, *Tuzk* (Trans. A. Rogers) p. 226.

surrounded by the marriage party, which consisted of a colourful crowd of men and women, presented a striking picture. Passing through the bazaar we reached Amtar, where we rested for the night in the Raja's guest house overlooking the Beas.

Bathed in the light of the moon, the Beas which is mild and gentle here, appeared like a magic lake. The full moon had spread a mantle of silver over the Beas valley. On the high bank of the river was a tree with leaves shining like golden lamps. These were the young coppery leaves of the pipal, transformed by the moonlight into myriads of fairy lamps. In the morning the blazing sun of April came out from behind the pipal tree, turning their copper into molten gold. Thus I realised that the ancient Hindu poet was not exaggerating when he said that in the roots of the pipal is Brahma, in its trunk Vishnu, and on every leaf sits a god.

During the rains when rolling curly clouds are seen on the mountains, the landscape becomes most picturesque. By the time we finished our dinner, clouds had gathered and there was a wonderful display of lightning behind the Jwalamukhi range. The flashes of lightning had turned the river into molten gold against which the dark hump of the Jwalamukhi range presented a striking contrast.

Amtar literally means a ferry under a mango, and derives its name from a large-size mango tree under which there is a ferry. Hillmen used to cross the river from this point with the aid of inflated skins. Sansar Chand used to watch the Beas from the balconies of his palaces in Amtar, but now they have been washed away by the river; the only sign of any habitation in the past is a winding stony path and this is also crumbling. It is said that Sansar Chand in his last days, when he was frustrated due to the humiliation suffered at the hands of Ranjit Singh, lived in this palace in the company of Jamalo, his favourite dancing girl. Traces of her residence can still be seen near the *maidan*. Sansar Chand shut himself in his riverside palace, became a recluse, and asked the courtiers and visitors to salute a '*kamal*' tree at the entrance of the palace and depart. This salute to the '*kamal*' tree is still well-known to the people of Kangra, who sometimes practise it on unwanted visitors. The oldest house in the compound of the Raja's palace, a four-storeyed stone building, was built by Raja Jodhbir Chand, the youngest son of Sansar Chand. The parade ground, where the Raja's troops used to parade, now greatly reduced in size, is used as a foot-ball ground by the boys of the local Government High School.

On this visit, I was accompanied by my wife, Dr W.G. Archer, Dr M. R. Anand, his wife Shirin and Secretary Dolly Sahiar. The ladies from Bombay thought it would be improper to leave without thanking the Rani who was in *pardah*. We dissuaded them, but they persisted. After half an hour, they all returned looking unhappy and downcast. What happened on the visit to the palace was thus narrated to us by my wife:

"As soon as we reached the palace, we met Kanwar Sahib, the eight-



year-old son of the Raja. We asked him, 'Where is your mother?' He raised his finger towards a room upstairs and said, 'She is there.' Then he led us upstairs and went to his mother. We all stood in a porch, where some servant girls were sitting. One of them was heating a pot on a stove, and the other was searching for something in a wicker-box. We asked them to inform the Rani that their guests had come to see her. They gave no reply, shook their heads and started giggling looking at each other.

"In the meantime, an old man came and said, 'You go downstairs, Rani Sahib will not meet you.'

"We thought, he did not know who we were, and again said, 'You go and inform the Rani Sahib that we have come to thank her for her hospitality.' In the meantime, we heard the noise of the banging of a door and of some one shuffling away. This was Rani Sahib escaping into another room. Then we heard a whisper from behind the wall, 'Tell them, she is bathing and cannot see them.' On hearing this, we quietly descended the stairs and came away."

On hearing this account of the encounter of modern urban India with the feudal India of the 19th century, we had a hearty laugh. Our guests from Bombay felt particularly embarrassed as we had told them that these urban courtesies were not necessary behind the *zenana* walls of Nadaun. We packed and left for the ferry, and spent some time exploring the temples of Nadaun.

In the town, there are five temples and a Gurdwara. On the left side of the *ghat* is a temple of Shiva in which there are some very interesting mural paintings in the Kangra style. On my last visit to Nadaun, I found that they had been whitewashed by a puritanical devotee, a railway clerk, who thought that the sight of nude milk-maids begging Krishna to return their clothes was shocking to his sense of propriety. I called the priest and some school boys and they brought pails of water, and together gave a thorough rub to the coat of lime. We were able to recover some of the murals, but many were irretrievably ruined. How many art treasures in India have been lost due to the misguided zeal of people who had no aesthetic sensibility is hard to reckon.

After seeing Nadaun, its temples, palaces, and Kangra paintings, we left for Dehra Gopipore and Dada Siba. No doubt, Nadaun has lost its importance, for it is no longer the capital of the Kangra Valley, but it is still beautiful, and it will remain a charming place as long as the Beas continues to flow at its feet. Back in the plains, the idyllic picture of the river, with cows grazing on its bank, and crowds of colourful men and women, waiting for boats at the ferry, appears in the mind's eye and continues to haunt me. The early monsoon showers in July are a reminder that mangoes in the gardens of Nadaun have ripened, the river is flowing in a mighty current, and on the crest of Jwalamukhi range dark rain-clouds are gathering. There is no doubt that there is truth in the saying so common in the Kangra Valley, "Who will go away, who comes to Nadaun!"

## A Vanished River

**W**E HAD A long journey ahead of us, a visit to Tira Sujanpur, the capital of Katoch Rajas where Kangra painting received the enthusiastic patronage of Sansar Chand. We left Kangra before sunrise and were fortunate to see a sight of great beauty. A whole hill-side was covered with a forest of kachnar (*Bauhinea variegata*) in blossom. The mauve blossoms of kachnar were shining with heavenly beauty under the rays of the morning sun.

Now we were on the main road and were passing through the most magnificent scenery in whole of India. To the north the mighty wall of Dhauladhar covered with glistening snow furnishes a background of overpowering grandeur to the terraced fields with wave-like embankments. Numerous water-courses which take their birth from the snows of Dhauladhar irrigate the fields. The terraces have a gentle gradient and the valley appears almost flat. The gently sloping plain is studded with the homesteads of farmers. To the north of the road there are rolling downs strewn all over with boulders, whose grey colour is masked by a dark covering of myxophyceae with yellow dashes of lichens. These boulders half-buried in the soil surrounded by green grass are a characteristic feature of the Kangra Valley. The boulders are a reminder of the Glacial Age, almost a million years ago when glaciers of the Dhauladhar reached as low an altitude as 2,000 feet above sea level, and covered most of the Kangra Valley. In fact they are moraines of the glaciers which retreated with the onset of warmer weather. Rajol is another idyllic road-side village traversed by a meandering stream. From Gaggal a magnificent view of the Dhauladhar can be had. The bed of the *khad* is strewn with huge stones and boulders and the sides are covered with mango trees. The Dhauladhar in its towering magnificence dominates the landscape.

The tops of the hills are capped with umbrella-like pipal trees planted by the villagers scores of years ago to provide shade to cowherds and graziers. The road has a gentle gradient and is almost straight with only mild curves. From there onwards the hills are covered with a luxuriant pine forest and

tea gardens with clipped box-like tea bushes shaded by grim oec trees are in evidence. As we ascend, Dhauladhar, looming like a phantom in the mist, stands out more clearly; it is impressive and its grandeur and majesty is almost overwhelming.

About three miles below Palampur, the road to Sujanpur branches off. Below the road is a water-course constructed by Kirpal Chand, younger brother of Raja Bhim Chand in 1690. This is the earliest irrigation work in the Valley which takes its discharge from the snow-fed mountain torrents of the Dhauladhar. It is a great boon to the farmers and the name of Kirpal Chand is still remembered with affection, as one of the benefactors of the Valley.

The road now flanks the village of Bhawarna where lived Mian Ram Singh from whom I purchased a large series of Kangra paintings. A mile below this is a place which provides a grand view of the Dhauladhar with the foreground of the intensively cultivated valley of Chimal Har with wave-like fields which produce bumper crops of paddy. The background is provided by the snow wall of the Great White Range shining in its majesty under the rays of the morning sun. At the sides of the road are groves of mangoes and at the back of the farmers' homesteads are clusters of plantains.

The road now passed through terraces of clay and sand, impregnated with rounded pebbles of various sizes.

"This appears to be a strange country," said Galbraith. "Look at those rounded pebbles, some as big as a man's head and the others no larger than an orange, so neatly deposited in the matrix of clay and sand!"

"These are the deposits of the Shiwalik river, also called the Indo-Brahm," I replied. "The Indo-Brahm was a mighty river, which received the combined discharge of the Brahmaputra, the Ganges and the Indus rivers. It emptied itself in the gradually receding Miocene Sea of the Punjab and Sind, in itself a remnant of the shrinking Tethys Ocean."

"How long ago was that?"

"This was about 26 million years ago."

"What happened to the Indo-Brahm river?"

"In the last ice age, about a million years ago when glacial climate prevailed over the earth, the Pothohar plateau of the West Punjab was raised by an elevatory movement of the earth. This reversed the flow of the Indo-Brahm river. The drainage of the part of the Himalayas to the west of Simla flowed into the channels of the Chenab, the Ravi, the Beas, and the Sutlej, while that of the ranges to the east of Simla flowed back by the long-established channels of the Jumna, the Ganges and other rivers into the Bay of Bengal. The upper course of the Indo-Brahm river turned abruptly south to form the modern Brahmaputra."

"Is there any evidence of change in the course of these rivers?"

"A remarkable evidence of the reversal of the flow of these rivers is in the V-shape these rivers assume in certain portions of their course. The points



FIG. 1 Dhauladhar, the white snow range, monarch of the Outer Himalayas

FIG. 2 Two Gaddi boys entertained us with folk-songs



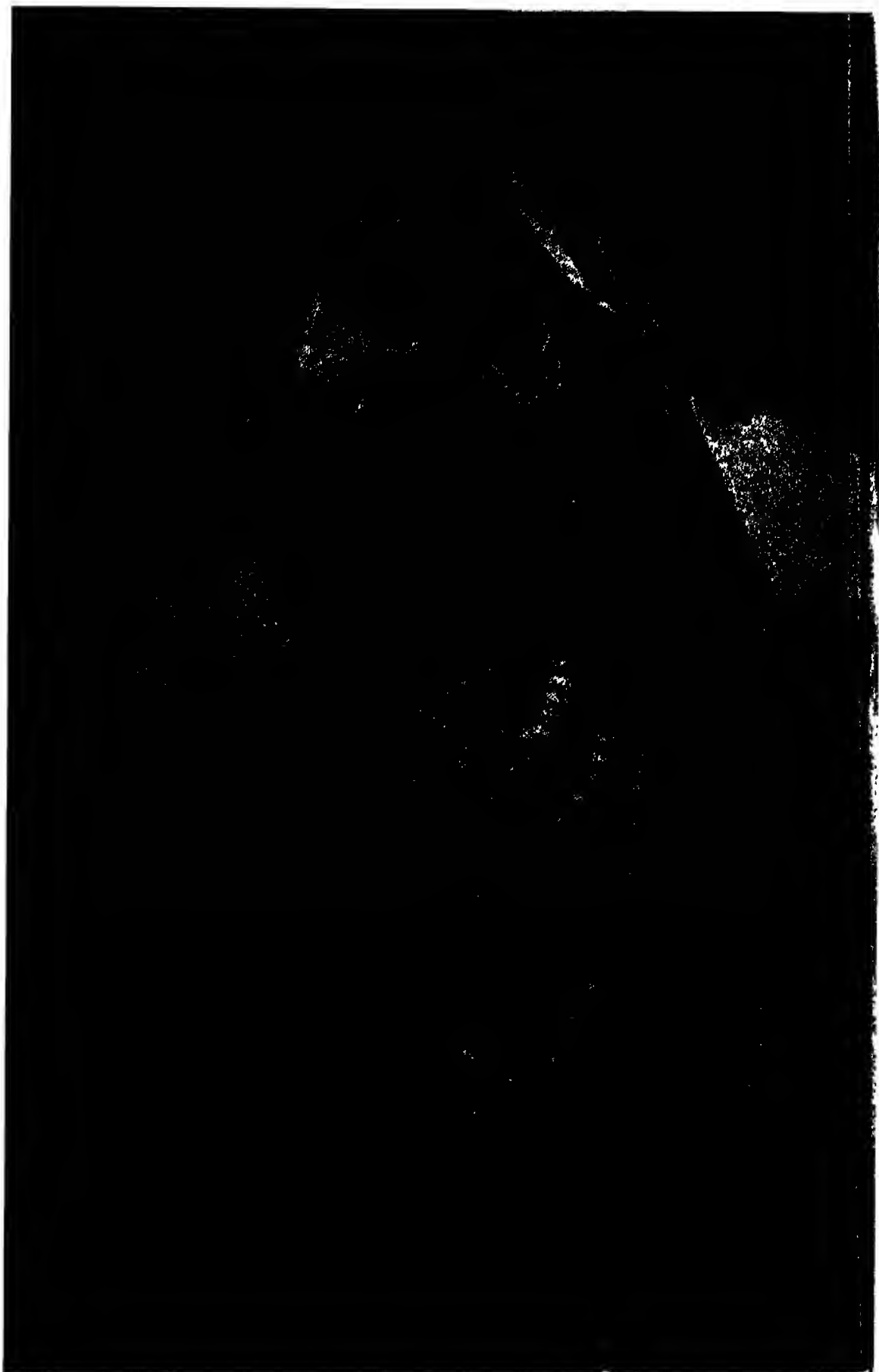


FIG. 3 A comely Gaddi maiden



FIG. 4 A Gujar beauty



FIG. 5 The polo ground at Haripur Guler. The temple of Devi is on the hilltop in the background.

FIG. 6 The Fort at Haripur Guler



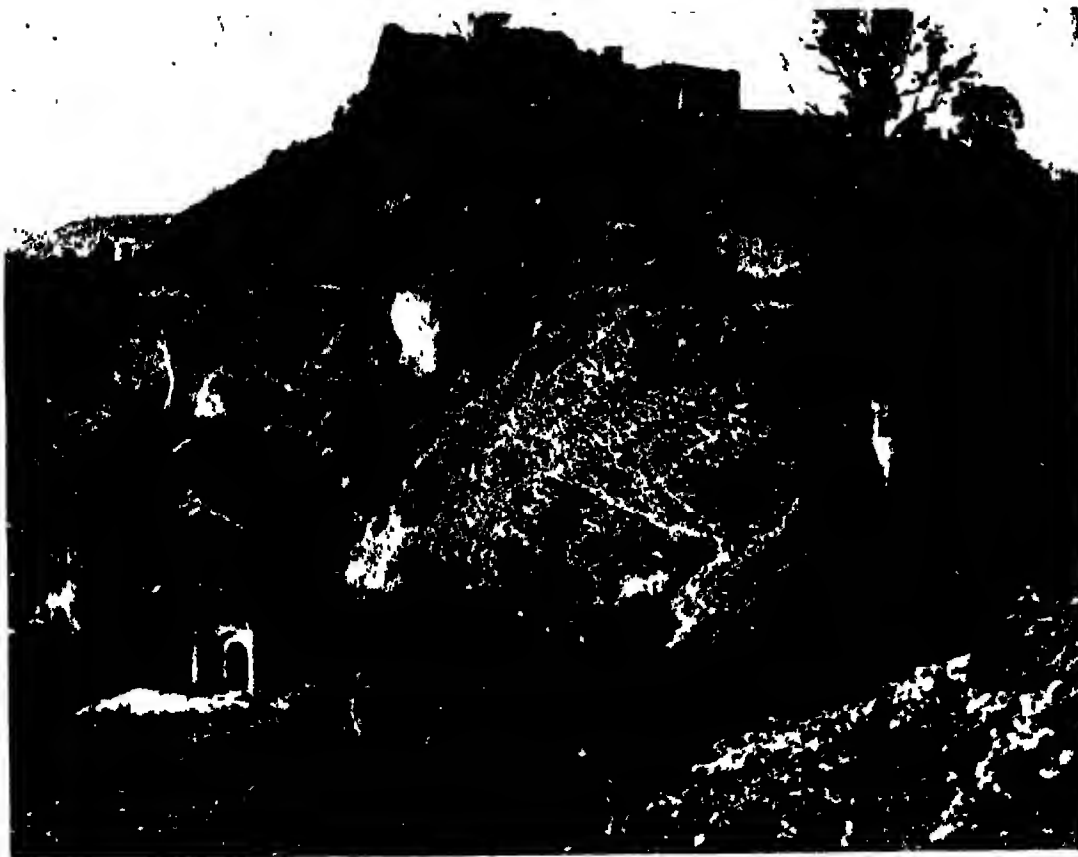


FIG. 7 The Kangra Fort after it was destroyed in the earthquake of 1905.

FIG. 8 The Kangra Fort in 1850 (from an old sketch).

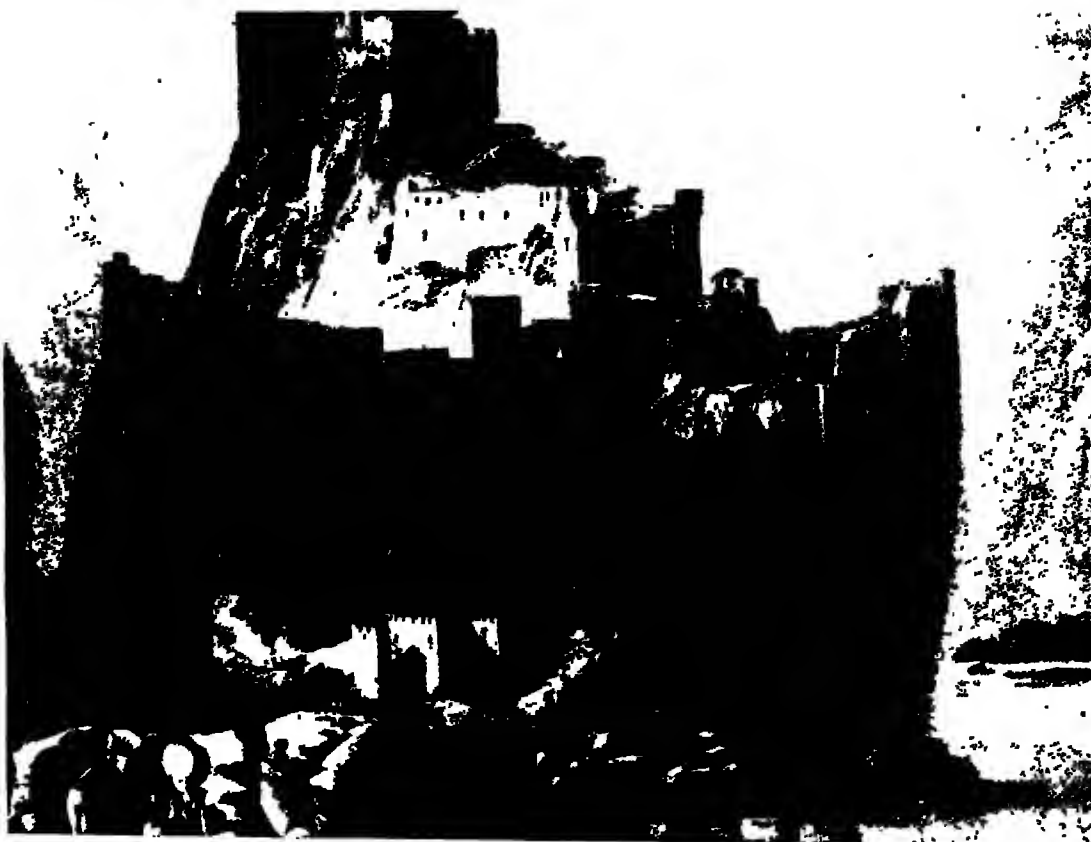






FIG. 9 Galbraiths with Gaddi belles



FIG. 10 The author with W. G. Archer and M. R. Anand at Kangra. In the background is the gorge of the Banganga





FIG. 12 The homesteads in Palampur look charming against the background of snow-covered mountains

FIG. 13 Necklaces of beads are popular with hill women





FIG. 14 A marriage party we met on the way to Andretta

FIG. 15 The rice terraces of Chimbahar

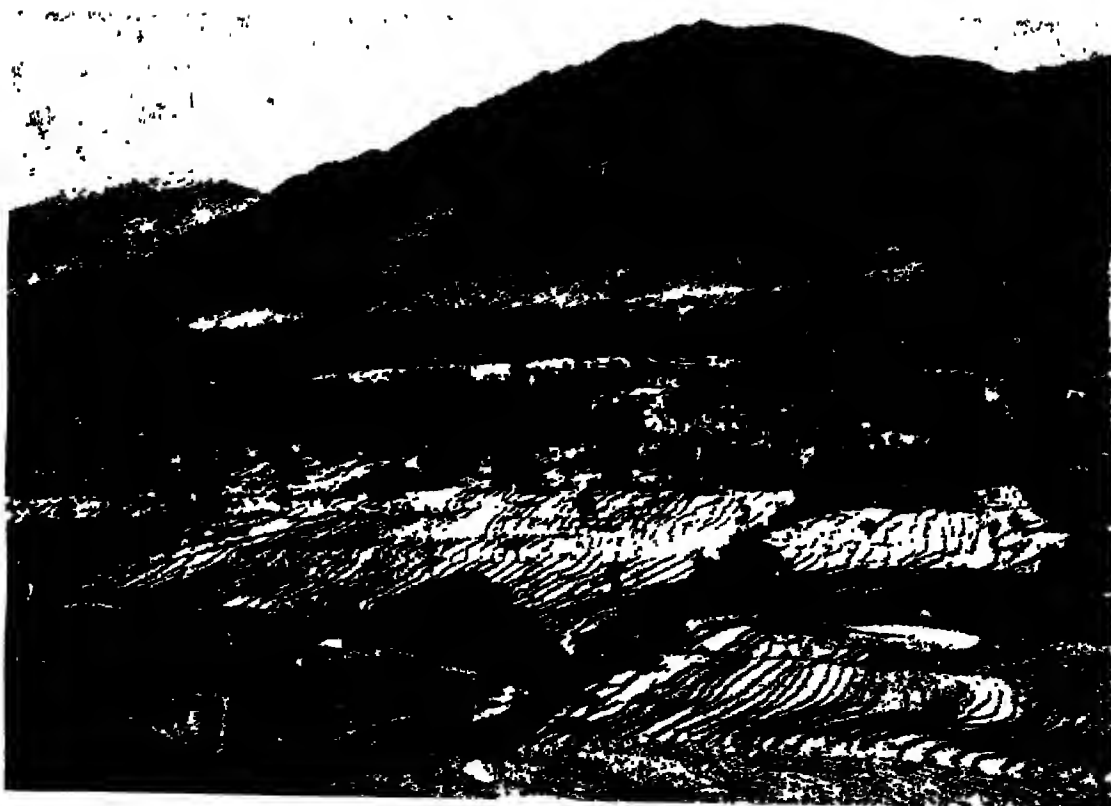




Fig. 36. A Gaddi child charms by her innocent smile



FIG. 17. The final scene in the ward, the reflection of the white, snow-covered mountain in the pool at Minato.

FIG. 18. Giddis, facing to the tune of a trumpet.





FIG. 19 Gaddi boys and girls. The girls tie black woollen ropes around their waists

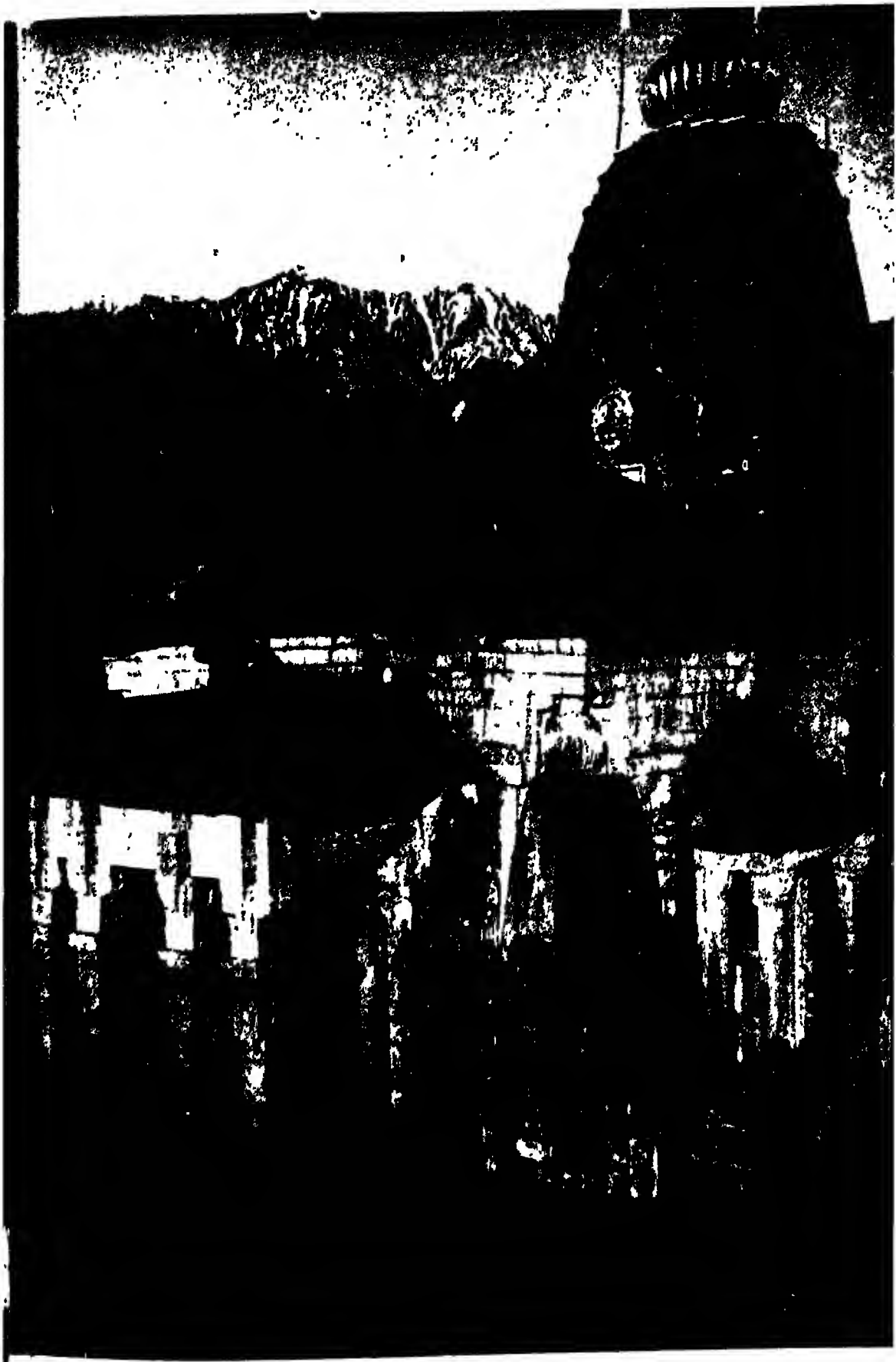


FIG. 20 The Shiva temple at Baijnath





Fig. 21 Main stones at Riwalsu

Fig. 22 Mudi with the River Beas in front





FIG. 23. Rowdun. To the right is the Hindu temple, and to the left, the Tibetan temple of Padma Suddhaya.

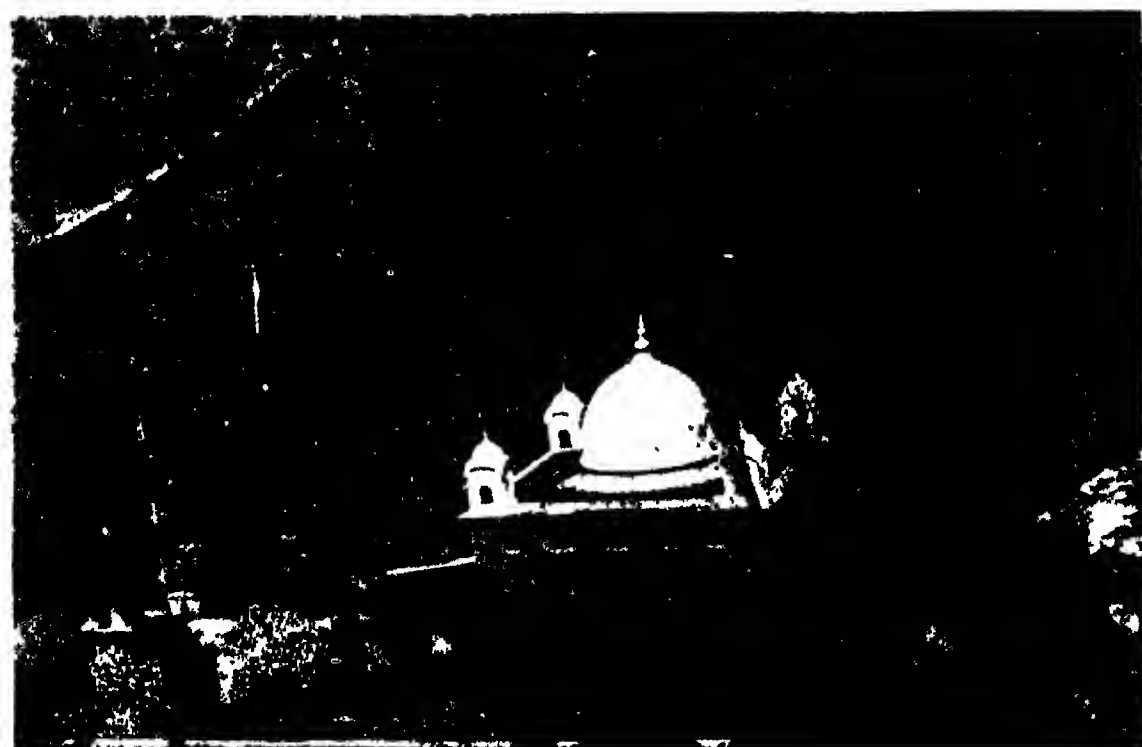
FIG. 24. Mass of the male bells.





FIG. 25 The Shiva temple at Riwalsai. In front is the image of Nandi bull, and to the right, is that of Ganesha.

FIG. 26 The Sikh temple dedicated to Guru Gobind Singh at Riwalsai.



of the V are in every case directed north-westwards ”

“What was the fate of the neglected bed of the river?”

“The boulders and pebbles embedded in a matrix of sand and clay accumulated in the neglected bed of the Indo-Brahm river were ultimately uplifted and folded, resulting in a chain of hills —the Shiwaliks of the present day.”

“Is there any other evidence that these three rivers —the Indus, the Ganges and the Brahmaputra —once constituted one river system, the Indo-Brahm?”

“Other evidence lies in the distribution of fresh-water animals. There is a species of *Platanista*, a fresh-water porpoise peculiar to the Indus, the Ganges and the Brahmaputra, which is even now found in the two rivers, Indus and the Ganges. *Platanista gangetica* described by Lebeck is identical with *Platanista indi* described by Blyth as a distinct species from the Indus. The Indus species which is identical with the earlier known Gangetic form also occurs in the Brahmaputra, but not in the Mahanadi in South India. There are some species of tortoises which are found in the Indus as well as the Ganges. There are many other fresh-water animals which are common to both the Ganges and the Indus.”

“Now tell me about the birth of the Himalayas ”

“Before I tell you how the Himalayas were born it is necessary to give a background of the type of life which existed in the Mesozoic era which lasted for about a hundred million years. Mesozoic was the age of reptiles, cycads and pteridosperms. In the Carboniferous period when the coal deposits of the earth were laid by the submergence of forests, amphibians and reptiles ruled the earth. The highest plants were ferns or fern-like trees and horsetails. This was 260 million years ago. At that time South India was joined with South Africa, Madagascar, South America, Australia and Antarctic, and formed a continent known as Gondwanaland. The Carboniferous period was followed by the Triassic and the Jurassic periods. This was the age of reptiles, and they conquered the earth, sea and the air and grew tremendously in sizes and numbers. The herbivorous sauria covered themselves with spiked and plated armour of thick bone and some had enormous horns. They looked more like tanks than animals. They were thus equipped to protect themselves against the predatory sauria, who walked on their hind-legs, balancing themselves with the help of their thick tails. Their fore-legs were weak and were almost useless appendages. They had enormous heads with jaws full of huge teeth. Many of the herbivorous dinosaurs hid deep in lakes and lagoons to escape these brainless fighting machines of immense power. The Cretaceous period, about 110 million years ago, marked the close of the Mesozoic era. At that time a climatic change occurred. The cold climate that ushered in proved hard for the giant sauria who could not survive and became extinct. The plant life was also affected, and the herbivorous dinosaurs could no longer

have that abundant vegetable food to which they were accustomed. Then we come to the Eocene period about 70 million years ago. A group of animals known as mammals evolved from the reptiles. The scales were converted into hair, and the eggs were retained inside the female. The reptiles were well on their way to extinction and as they died out, the animals, who were no bigger than hedgehogs or moles, were on the ascendant. The vegetation also changed. Pines gave way to flowering trees, the angiosperms, which now covered the surface of the earth."

"Now tell me about the geography of the Eocene period, and also how the Himalayas were born."

"In the Eocene period about 70 million years ago, the Gujarat coast of Gondwanaland was washed by a small bay of the Tethys Sea which extended along the Equator from the present Mediterranean, with one of its remnants, to the heart of China. In the beginning of the Eocene, a gigantic volcanic discharge of the Deccan lavas took place, and this led to the dismemberment of the Gondwanaland. It is estimated that 400,000 cubic miles of molten rock, which exceeds in bulk and volume the entire Himalayas, was poured out from the bowels of the earth. Ejection of so much matter disturbed the balance of the earth and according to geologists it led to the sinking of the Indo-Gangetic plain to a depth of many thousands of feet in front of the Himalayas, causing dismemberment of the Gondwanaland and uplift of the Himalayas. This dismemberment was not a sudden event but was probably a long process. The first part to separate was Australia and the Malay Archipelago. Later on, South America drifted away from South Africa. Lastly, the land bridge between India and Madagascar, known as Lemuria foundered and the Arabian Sea came into existence. It also resulted in the uplift of the overloaded bed of the Tethys into the lofty chains of the Himalayas. There were no human beings at that time to witness the earth-shattering series of events: not even anthropoid apes. Our ancestors at that time were small, primitive shrew-like mammals who were well protected with hairy coats against the cold."

"Were the Himalayas heaved up all at once or did this happen over a period?"

"The mountain-building movements continued through the Tertiary era and far into the Pleistocene period when arctic conditions prevailed in northern India. The first upheaval took place towards the end of the Eocene, and the central axis of ancient sedimentary and crystalline rocks was ridged up. This was followed by a second upheaval about the middle of the Miocene. The third upheaval elevated the central part of the range as well as the fluviatile deposits of the Shiwalik river into the Shiwalik mountains. The last upheaval began towards the end of the Pliocene, and continued till after the middle of the Pleistocene."

"What is the evidence that the Himalayas were once under the sea?"

"If you happen to visit Lahaul and Spiti you will notice some of the

exposed rocks in which the strata are laid one over the other, like the leaves of a book. In these areas fossils of marine animals like corals, sea-lilies and ammonites are common. Black stones with impressions of marine shelled animals like ammonites commonly known as Shaligrams, are brought from the Himalayas by *sadhus* and sold in the bazaars of Hardwar. The limestone from this area is composed of millions of shells of minute sea animals known as radiolaria, which must have swarmed the ancient Asiatic Mediterranean, the Tethys."

"This is indeed a fascinating story which the geologists have so patiently built up during the last century from scattered evidence."

"Even before the modern geologists unravelled the history of this part of the earth, there came an observant traveller, Al-beruni by name, to India who guessed the true nature of the north Indian alluvial plains."

"Who was Al-beruni?"

"He was a native of Khiva, then called Khwarism. His country was invaded by Mahmood of Ghazni and he was brought as a hostage to Ghazni. This was the same Mahmood who brought so much misery to India by his invasion. Al-beruni was a scholar of mathematics and astronomy. He travelled in India from 1017 to 1030 and studied the country, its mathematics and astronomy."

"What observations did he make on India?"

"Describing the alluvium of north India, Al-beruni observes: 'If you have seen the soil of India with your own eyes and meditated on its nature—if you consider the rounded stones found in the earth however deeply you dig, stones that are huge, near the mountains and where the rivers have a violent current; stones that are of small size, at a greater distance from the mountains, and where the streams flow slowly, stones that appear pulverized in the shape of sand where the streams begin to stagnate near their mouths and near the sea—if you consider all this, you could scarcely help thinking that India has once been a sea which by degrees has been filled up by the alluvium of the streams.'"

"This is indeed a remarkable observation which only a genius could make. You mentioned a land bridge between Africa and India. Is there any evidence of that?"

"There is plenty of evidence in the bones of the extinct animals of the Shiwaliks which have been converted into stones and are found in its stratified clay deposits. Fossilized bones of 30 species of elephants, of many species of giraffes, hippopotami, horses, camels and antelopes have been discovered. Giraffes and hippopotami wandered from Africa and crossed over to north India by the land bridge. There were some animals in the Shiwaliks which exist no more on this earth. One of the oddest creatures which roamed the Shiwaliks forests was *Sivatherium* which was larger than a rhinoceros, had four horns and a proboscis. This strange creature has since become extinct."

"Is there any evidence of man in these deposits?"

"Man had not come into existence as yet. There were apes and man-like apes closely related to human stem which have been given the names of *Dryopithecus*, *Sivapithecus* and *Ramapithecus*."

We were looking at the blue Shiwaliks and the Himalayas with different eyes. We understood why the Shiwaliks are such a menace to the fertile fields of the farmers of Hoshiarpur district. The Shiwaliks are the youngest of the Himalayan system and are really the remnants of a mighty river whose bed had been folded and uplifted producing a chain of hills. My companions also understood the true nature of the Himalayas where we were to wander for many months. These mountains had been silent spectators of the strange drama of life which was played before them in the course of many million years, compared with which, the brief span of human history seems insignificant. Yet this brief span is so important in the sense that it represents the triumph of the human mind over the blind forces of nature. The finest products of the human mind are science and art which hold out the promise of shaping a better humanity, a creative humanity which would master its environment more skilfully with the aid of science, and a refined and more sensitive humanity which would imbibe the achievements of the human spirit in the realm of art. The mountains ahead of us nurtured an art of surpassing loveliness in its paintings. It was almost after two millenia since Ajanta that the Indian spirit blossomed into an art with a dream-like quality and a spirit of joy. 'Are we not fortunate to travel in the Punjab Himalayas in search of these paintings?' we wondered.

## Home of the King of Mountains

**I**N THE PADDY fields were pairs of Sarus cranes ambling along with long strides and watching the motor lorries suspiciously. These birds are known for their faithfulness to each other. If one of them is killed, the other wanders about uttering mournful cries till he dies. Their loyal love has been extolled in many poems of India. If you see them in the morning it is regarded as auspicious. To a traveller it means a happy and a safe journey.

The road descends to the level of Mhol Khad and on the opposite side are heavily eroded mountains.

"That is a peculiar mountain!" said Mrs Galbraith pointing towards a pillar-like hillock on the other side of the torrent.

"It is called Gowal Tilla, which means the Mountain of the Grazier. It was the scene of a grim tragedy many years ago," I replied.

"What happened on that mountain? It does look sinister!" remarked Mrs Galbraith.

"About a century ago, a herdsman was grazing his cows at this place and he saw a young woman draped in a crimson red veil passing by. Charmed by the beauty of the woman, he remarked:

*Awār jarārt pār jarārt*

*Lāl ghunde wālt mēt lārt*

The first line is meaningless. It is a device commonly adopted in folk songs of Kangra and Kulu for the purpose of rhyming. The second line means: 'The woman with the red veil is my bride.' On hearing an unknown person claiming her as his bride the young woman in red wanted to test his affection and remarked, "Oh, gallant young man, if you want to marry me, you should jump from the top of this mountain!" Intoxicated by his new-born love, the grazier jumped from the peak, fell in the gorge and died.



"What a silly girl," remarked Mrs Galbraith. "She ought not to have tested that young man in that manner."

"The young woman in red was so much overwhelmed by this demonstration of faith and love that she also jumped from the same peak and died," I replied.

"What happened after these suicides?" asked Mrs Galbraith.

"Both the lovers were cremated together near the site of their martyrdom. If they had not died in this manner, nobody would have bothered about them. Thousands of hillmen and women have lived normal lives, going through the cycle of drudgery and raising families. Nobody mentions their names. Surely, it is the people, who have strong emotions, are the salt of the earth. The grazier and the woman in red belonged to this category."

The wayfarers who pass by Gawal Tilla are reminded of this strange demonstration of madness by two persons, who never knew each other, met for the first time at this spot, and gave their lives for each other. This strange anecdote of love at first sight is still remembered by the people of the Kangra Valley with mingled feelings of sympathy, admiration and amusement. After half an hour we reached Alampur on River Beas, where Sansar Chand had spent his last days. I suggested to Mrs Galbraith and her secretary, O'Neil, that we should see the ruins of Alampur before crossing the river to Sujampur. It was a pleasant walk through fields of green wheat and mango gardens.

"Who was Sansar Chand?" asked Mrs Galbraith.

"Sansar Chand was the ruler of Kangra State, who gave patronage to artists. In fact, after the rulers of Guler, he was the chief patron of Kangra paintings," I replied.

We came to a garden littered with ruins of palaces and pavilions. On the opposite side was the Beas flanked with mountains capped with fortresses and palaces of Tira. These are the places where Kangra art, which had its birth in Guler, was cradled.

"Please tell us more about Sansar Chand," said Mrs Galbraith.

"After they had lost Kangra Fort to the army of Jahangir, the rulers of Kangra made Nadaun, on the other side of the Beas, their capital. Sansar Chand was born in 1775. The Mughal Empire had weakened and the plains of the Punjab were repeatedly invaded and ravaged by the Afghans led by Ahmed Shah. Taking advantage of the chaos in the plains, Ghamand Chand, grandfather of Sansar Chand acquired supremacy over the hills. He built the town of Tira Sujampur. Sansar Chand was only 10 years of age when he became the Raja of Kangra. When he was 16, he captured the Kangra Fort, and became the supreme ruler of the Kangra Valley. He conquered all the neighbouring Hill States and for the next 20 years his power was uncontested. His generosity attracted artists, scholars, craftsmen and professional singers and dancers to his court. Large series of paintings were produced by the artists for his enjoyment. This can be

called the Golden Age of Kangra Kingdom. He was kind and just to his subjects, who also affectionately responded and called him Pahar Badshah, the 'King of Mountains.'

"How long did this spell of creative activity last?"

"The best paintings were painted in the last quarter of the 18th century. In 1805 the Gurkhas of Nepal invaded the Kangra Valley. Sansar Chand was defeated and he took shelter in Kangra Fort. The Valley was utterly ruined. Cultivation was neglected, grass grew in the towns, and the streets of Nadaun and Sujampur became the haunts of leopards and tigers. Sansar Chand supplicated Maharaja Ranjit Singh for help. Ranjit Singh defeated the Gurkhas, but annexed the Fort as well as a large slice of the Kingdom of Kangra. Deprived of his kingdom, Sansar Chand abandoned the fortress palace of Tira Sujampur and settled here."

"Do we have any contemporary account of Sansar Chand?"

"It is in the paintings that we find the most authentic record of the life of Sansar Chand. In them we see him presiding over festivals of Krishna's birth, playing Holi with his courtiers, and practising archery. It is almost a pictorial diary of his daily life. Besides we have the account of Moorcroft, the English traveller who met Sansar Chand at this very place in 1820. He found the latter unhappy and frustrated. Describing his daily routine, he mentions that Sansar Chand spent the early hours of the day in prayer and ritual. This is true of Rajas even now. If you go to meet them in the forenoon you will always find them engaged in prayers. From ten till noon he met his courtiers. At noon he retired for about two hours. The rest of the day he spent listening to music and examining the paintings of his artists."

"Quite an idyllic existence."

"It was so. But Sansar Chand regarded it as a misfortune and he turned to art and music as an escape."

I explored the ruins thoroughly, and found that there were some buildings which had figured in the paintings of the *Sat Sai* series. A bungalow-like structure to the south was possibly the same which Sansar Chand allowed Moorcroft to occupy during his stay at Alampur. Moorcroft, who was a veterinary surgeon, occasionally tried his skill on human beings also. He cured Fateh Chand, younger brother of Sansar Chand, of a malignant fever. The grateful Fateh Chand made him his 'turban' brother. As Moorcroft states, "Fateh Chand, when sufficiently restored, insisted on exchanging his turban for my hat, and making me his brother by adoption. He placed his turban on my head and my hat on his; each waved his hand, holding a handful of rupees round the other's head and the rupees were distributed amongst the servants. He also gave me some green *dub* grass, which I was desired to wear, and thus, notwithstanding the difference of caste and complexion, I became an honorary member of the family of Sansar Chand. Whatever might be the value of such an association, it was a most

unequivocal testimony of the sincerity of their gratitude.”\* This was probably the first genuine contact of the West with the East in the Punjab hills. How heart-warming it is! But men like Moorcroft were rare in that age of mercenaries and predators who were swarming the country.

Now that we had had a good look at the ruins of Alampur, we decided to move on to Sujanpur. A gaily furnished boat was in readiness for us. We crossed the Beas and boarded a jeep which landed us in the bazaar of Sujanpur.

The citizens of Sujanpur were in a holiday mood. The streets were decorated with multi-coloured paper flags, and the people greeted us in a friendly manner. By the time we reached the parade ground, a large crowd of boys and girls had assembled and were following us. We were reminded of the Pied Piper of Hamelin.

While the meals were getting ready, the students of the local High School entertained us by singing folk songs and staging a drama. Both the boys and the girls participated in this programme. In the Punjab hills, where even today women cover their faces in the presence of strangers, this was a major social change. The drama was on the familiar folk song of the hills: a soldier returns after many years to his father-in-law's house and meets his wife at the well. She does not recognize him, and speaks harshly to him when he indulges in a mild flirtation. When he reaches her home, her mother recognizes him, and asks her daughter to dress herself in her best clothes and to look after him. He pretends to be angry and lies down covering himself with a blanket. When the drama reached this stage, Galbraith could not help gently poking the ribs of the offended soldier with his stick. This caused a good deal of amusement among the audience, and we all shared the fun.

In the afternoon, we paid a visit to the palace on the Tira Hill. At the entrance is a hall with twenty two doors, in each of which sat a hill Raja when Sansar Chand held his durbar. From this palace there is a magnificent view of the river, the hills, and the temples and houses of Sujanpur. Below is an open terrace on which dance performances were held on moonlit nights. The palaces where once lived the lovely queens of Sansar Chand are now in ruins. Sansar Chand, like most patrons of art, was romantic by nature. Apart from his four regular queens, he also married a beautiful shepherd girl whom he happened to see in a village near Palampur while he was out hunting.

After descending the mountain, we saw the Krishna temple built by Sansar Chand. Narbadeshwar temple built by his wife from Suket was seen next. It has beautiful murals depicting anecdotes from the *Ramayana*, the *Mahabharata* and the *Bhagavata Purana*. I saw them in good condition

\* William Moorcroft and George Trebeck (ed. H.H. Wilson), *Travels in the Himalayan Provinces of Hindoostan and the Punjab*, London, 1837, p. 126.

when I was there last. Now a number of them were damaged by thoughtless spraying of D.D.T.! This shows that the blessings of science are not unmixed.

After seeing the Narbadeshwar temple, we decided to explore the environs of Sujanpur. As we entered the fields of corn, we saw two stone horses behind a tomb. We were told that this was the grave of O'Brien, an Irishman, who was an employee of Sansar Chand. Moorcroft, the traveller, records having met him at Sujanpur. How O'Brien happened to reach Sujanpur is thus recorded by him:

"O'Brien is a strong stout man, about 40 years of age, and was once a dragoon in the 8th, or Royal Irish. It is said that, having gone on guard without some of his accoutrements, he was reprimanded by the officer, and on his replying insolently, the officer struck, or touched him, with his cane. O'Brien knocked him down with the butt end of his carbine, and then put spurs to his horse and galloped off. Not daring to return to his regiment, he wandered about the country for some time, and at last found service with Sansar Chand, for whom he has established a factory of small arms, and raised a disciplined force of 1,400 men."\*

O'Brien or 'Gul Brien', as hill people call him, is seen playing Holi with Sansar Chand and his courtiers in one of the paintings. He was perfectly at home in Sujanpur, and even married a hill woman. In his last years he became a drunkard and was frequently under the influence of drink which kept him confined to his harem for many days. It is said that among the Huns of South Russian steppes, when the King died, his horses as well as his concubines and cup-bearers were buried with him. When O'Brien died, following the custom of the Huns, his horses were also slain to follow him to such a bourne as he might attain.

The sun was about to set. We decided to hurry back towards Palampur, where we were expected by dinner time. A journey which would have normally taken three days, had been telescoped, American fashion, into a single day. I was dead tired, and sat glum and silent in the back-seat of the station wagon which was heroically negotiating steep climbs and wading through stones and pebbles. The beauty of the mountains and valleys is to be absorbed slowly. To hurry through them is spiritual vandalism. It was already dark, and the poetry of the scenery was muffled under the blanket of darkness. As there was nothing to see, our sole anxiety was to reach Palampur. When at last the lights of Palampur came in view, I breathed a sigh of relief. I was glad that my American friends, for whom it was then or never, had a glimpse of the home of the King of Mountains.

\* William Moorcroft and George Trebeck (ed. H.H. Wilson), *Travels in the Himalayan Provinces of Hindoostan and the Punjab*, London, 1837, p. 140.

## Quiet Flows the Beas

**W**E WERE ON our way to Dada Siba, a small State on the Beas, where some painting was done in the early half of the 19th century. We passed through a valley flanked by low dry hills. Here the villagers have to do a lot of hard work to obtain water for drinking. A ruined castle, a mouldering vestige of the glory of the Rajputs, was now in sight. From near this point the road to Haripur Guler branched to the right. The road was no longer metalled, and our jeep raised clouds of dust. Covered with a thick layer of dust we reached Dehra Gopipore, the tehsil headquarters, which has a straggling bazaar, and administrative buildings, the tehsil, and the police station. To the right is the travellers' rest house overlooking the Beas.

On reaching the bungalow we found that two rooms were occupied, and only one was free. Our party consisted of six, and two rooms were our minimum requirements. One of the occupants of the desired room was a forest contractor, middle-aged, with two young wives. He was reclining on a bed, and his wives were ministering to his comforts. One was pressing his legs, and the other rolling a betel leaf. The other room was occupied by an Englishman with an Indian wife, a pretty brunette, wearing a tight pullover and drain-pipe trousers. Fortunately for us, the forest contractor, whose permit for the occupation of the bungalow had expired, decided to leave. His servants started packing his luggage in a jeep. Possibly he was also keen to move to a more secluded bungalow where he could enjoy matrimonial bliss, undisturbed. While the room was being cleared, Anand and I sat on the grass-covered high bank, admiring the river.

The Beas is closely associated with the history of the Rajputs of Kangra; and it was on the banks of this river and its tributaries that the Katoch Rajas raised forts and palaces whose ruins can still be seen giving the Beas a remote resemblance to the Rhine, along whose banks the German knights raised their castles. It was in the villages on this river that the famous Kangra paintings of immortal fame, whose theme is love, were painted. In a number of these paintings we have glimpses of the Beas through the windows of the

palaces, and there is no doubt that the painters who were lovers of nature were deeply impressed by the sublime beauty of the mighty river.

The Beas takes its birth in the snows of the Rohtang Pass in Kulu and after tumbling down fearful chasms and gorges enters the Kulu Valley at Manali. For some miles it passes through the grandest scenery in the world and on its banks are stately forests of cedars and alders. After traversing Mandi it enters Kangra at Molag. Flanking the river are dreary hills sheltering fertile glades and hollows where cottages nestle under the hill-side and corn waves luxuriantly. After passing by Alampur and Tira Sujanpur and piercing the Jwalamukhi range it flows past Dera Gopipore. The river flows gently here. Lower down at Talwara the river leaves the hills. The river water in the winter months is clear; it murmurs gently along the stony rapids or reposes in deep lagoons which provide excellent trout fishing. Below Reh the river divides into three branches and near Mirthal it unites into a single stream again. At Mirthal ghat the hills subside and the liberated river sweeps down with a mighty force, enjoying the freedom of plains.

Some of the Englishmen who served as District Magistrates in Kangra had an inordinate passion for fishing. The Beas 'mahseer' is famous for its size and taste. In autumn, when the river water is clear, they used to arrange a down-the-river tour programme, starting from Jaisinghpur, passing through Lambagraon, Tira Sujanpur, Nadaun, and Dehra Gopipur. The *Sahibs* with their *Mem Sahibs* and *Baba Log* as their women and children were called, travelled in boats luxuriously furnished with carpets. Business was judiciously combined with pleasure. In the forenoon they caught mahseer in the river, and in the afternoon they heard appeals and tried cases. The more generous among them shared their surplus fish with the lawyers. The lawyers travelled on horse-back to the starting point, Jaisinghpur, and from there downwards they floated down the Beas on inflated skins of oxen, which look like decapitated corpses of giant pigs.

Those were the good old days when there were no legislative assemblies. If the old practices were followed now there would be questions in the Assembly and many anonymous complaints. I am reminded of a Punjab official who fixed his tour to Dehra Gopipore at the time of the fishing season. The Tehsildar failed to send him timely information about the arrival of mahseer in the river. He insulted the Tehsildar, and on some excuse suspended him. The Tehsildar happened to be a Rajput and was very popular with the villagers. On learning of his plight they gathered in large numbers near the tent of the official and staged a hostile demonstration. Later on the *Sahib* was reprimanded by the Government. So it is no longer possible for officials to combine business with pleasure in free India.

After the forest contractor had left, the object of our curiosity was the Englishman and his Indian wife.

"What a lovely woman!" observed Anand.

"Women of the Punjab and Kashmir were admired by the Europeans

from the time of the Mughals," I replied. "Bernier, who was the court physician of Shah Jahan, praises the clear complexions and fine forms of the women of Kashmir. Women of Lahore were regarded as the finest brunettes in all the Indies. Even the fastidious Frenchman, Jacquemont, who had no taste for brown beauties, stated that in the Punjab he saw very handsome women.'

"Who was this Jacquemont?" asked Anand.

"Jacquemont was a botanist who travelled through the Punjab during the reign of Ranjit Singh. There are a number of genera and species of Indian plants which have the letters JACQ. after them. The reference is to Jacquemont who described them first according to the Linnean system of binomial nomenclature. Besides there is a lovely climber with blue bell-like flowers named *Jacquemontia* after him which you will find in many Indian gardens."

"Now tell me something about the early Englishmen," Anand asked me. "Were they as insular and cold as the last generation who quitted India in 1947?"

"In the last quarter of the 18th century and the first half of the 19th century there was much more curiosity among Englishmen about India. They studied the Sanskrit classics, deciphered the inscriptions on stones and coins, explored the fauna and flora, and had much greater contact with the Indian population. In the paintings of the Company period we see Englishmen smoking the hooka, watching cock-fights and nautch performances. Some of them even married Indian women. This was due to the fact that there were no steamships. The sailing vessel took months from Calcutta to the port of London. As early as 1835 English travellers mention that the young sahibs were exposed not only to the dangers of the climate, but also the equally dangerous vicinity of the native females."

"Have you heard about the romance of Malka Begum, a niece of the Mughal king of Delhi, and Colonel James Gardner?"

"No. Tell me how the Mughal princess happened to marry an English military adventurer. It seems very much like the romance of our fellow-travellers," said Anand, who was watching the Englishman and his pretty Indian wife who were sipping beer in the verandah.

"Malka Begum was the most celebrated beauty in India. Vigne mentions that 'In her figure were united the graceful proportions of the Indian with the more rounded outlines of the European. Her hand and arm were a study for a sculptor; and the utmost regularity of feature, composed of the most perfect and delicate curves, was lighted up with a fire and expression that made her a fitting study for her renowned ancestor, the haughty and impetuous Nur Jahan Begum, 'the Light of the World'. The sister of Malka Begum was married to the King of Lucknow. Vigne mentions that on a visit to her 'his reprobate majesty chose to fall in love with her; and as the attachment was all on his side, he chose to play the tyrant, and made her a close prisoner.' "

"How was she rescued by Gardner from the King of Lucknow?"

"... 'Col. Gardner, instigated by those chivalrous feelings which were interwoven in his character, and thinking himself, moreover, under all circumstances, in every way justified in doing so, determined to attempt her rescue; and by dint of bribery, and some fighting, succeeded in carrying her off from Lucknow, and eventually received herself, her father, and several of her brothers, as his guests at Khasganj. Malka was provided with apartments in a pavilion, in the centre of the *zenana* gardens; but the 'mille custodie' were of no use; messages were passed between her and her present lord, encouragement was given, the wall was scaled, interviews were granted, they determined not to wait any longer, and an elopement was agreed upon.' Soon after, they married. Gardner's father was annoyed by this adventure. The son implored his forgiveness and the daughter-in-law was also introduced to him. After some days his father told him that 'though his opinion of his conduct could not but remain unchanged, as far as principle was concerned, yet that he had ceased to be surprised at it, after he had witnessed her extraordinary beauty.' "\*"

The next morning we crossed the river over a bridge of boats. Our jeep was now ploughing through rounded pebbles which were strewn in the beds of the river and the numerous mountain torrents. The road to Dada Siba, about 12 miles long, is shady and there is a fine avenue of mango trees, broad-leaved bahera, and arjun, which provide shade to the traveller. At last we reached the Dada Khad, a mountain torrent of great width and which is covered with pebbles. We stopped for a while under a mango tree from where an excellent view of the old residence of the Raja of Dada Siba can be had; the Baradari and the Raja's palace standing on a mountain spur above the village of Dada, appear very impressive. We crossed the Khad and passed through a luxuriant forest of amaltas, baheras, and bamboos, owned by the Raja. The feather-like leaves of bamboos, clothing the hills, were very beautiful. The Bara Dari, which was the residence of the Rajas, has crumbled, and is a roofless shell. Murals, which must have been attractive when the palace was inhabited, have faded away.

Siba State was an off-shoot of Guler; in A.D. 1460, Sibarn Chand, a younger brother of the Raja of Guler, made himself independent, and founded his capital which he called Siba after his own name, on the left bank of the Beas. Jahangir passed through Siba in 1622 on his way to Kangra. In 1808 Siba was annexed by Raja Bhup Singh of Guler, and in 1809 along with Guler and other hill states it came under Ranjit Singh. Siba escaped ruin owing to the fact that Raja Dhian Singh, the minister of Maharaja Ranjit Singh had married two Siba princesses. Raja Gobind Singh died in 1845, and was succeeded by his son Raja Ram Singh, who drove out the Sikhs from the Siba Fort during the second Sikh War. In 1865, Ram Singh built a temple at Dada, which contains some interesting murals painted

\* Vigne, G.T. *Travels in Kashmir, Ladak and Iskardo*, Vol. I, London, 1842, pp. 44, 46.



by masons from Haryana in Hoshiarpur District. The temple is dedicated to Krishna, Shiva and Durga. The colour of the murals is still fresh, and many of them are interesting. Among these is a composite elephant, composed of women, on which Krishna is sitting along with Radha. In another, Krishna is killing Kalia, the serpent. In the third, Rama is breaking the bow of Shiva. Raja Ram Singh is also shown in one of the murals. Ram Singh died in 1874, but he is still remembered for the temple he had built. The fort at Siba, now no longer inhabited, is in ruins.

After examining the ruins of the Baradari, we paid a visit to Rani Abhrol, a spirited old lady, the grand-aunt of the Raja. In the verandah of her house were some old Kangra paintings pasted on the wall. As they were exposed to light and dust, the colours of the paintings had faded, which proves that colours of the Kangra paintings retain their brilliance only when they are kept wrapped up in *bastas* and are not exposed to direct light.

"Have you any other paintings apart from those on the wall?" I enquired.

"I had some of the 'Wah Guruji ka Khalsa and Wah Guruji ki Fateh' type, but they were taken away by a Sikh official who came to see me."

"What does she mean?" asked Anand.

"She is referring to the Sikh paintings in which untrimmed beards are common. In the Kangra paintings of 18th century, the beards of men are trimmed in the Muslim style. In the paintings of the early 19th century, when Ranjit Singh had become the paramount ruler of the Punjab, long beards became fashionable. He even granted allowances to the hill chiefs to grow beards. That is why the portraits of all the Rajput hill chiefs from this period resemble those of Sikhs. Even the European adventurers like Ventura, Allard and Avitabile had long flowing beards. Have you read the travels of Joseph Wolff, a Christian missionary, who came to Lahore and Amritsar in 1832?"

"No. Tell me what happened to him when he came to the Land of Beards."

"After travelling through Bokhara and Afghanistan, Wolff desired an interview with Ranjit Singh. Before the royal interview he wished to have his beard shaved off, but Allard, with whom he was living, told him not to do that by any means as Ranjit Singh was very fond of people with fine beards. Wolff said, 'My beard is not fine, for I have not combed it for months.' But Allard replied, 'You look all the more romantic on that account—you look like a lion!' And so Wolff left his beard, which was reddish in hue, and a foot long, untouched. He had a cordial interview with Ranjit Singh, who on learning that he had come to preach Christianity in Punjab, advised him to pay attention to the Englishmen in Simla who had no religion. Returning from the Court to the house of General Allard, the first thing Wolff did was, to have his beard shaved off. One of the Sikhs who stood by wept, and said, 'Why do you cut off the ornament of men?' However, Wolff ate his

dinner more easily and with better zest, after he had unburdened himself of his beard; for it was of prodigious size, and much confused and matted for want of dressing, which, Allard said, made him look like a lion."

"He must have felt happy on getting rid of many months' growth of hair."

"Yes, but he had a surprise before he left. When he was outside the town, to his greatest horror, Ranjit Singh sent for him to come back immediately, as he wished again to talk to him. Wolff returned, but without a beard; and the moment Ranjit Singh saw him, he exclaimed, 'Ho! ho! ho! where have you left your beard?' Wolff said, 'It is well taken care of, in the house of your Majesty's general.' He replied, 'I shall cut off his nose, the first day I see the fellow.' " \*

Taking leave of the Rani, we paid a visit to the young Raja of Dada Siba, who lived in a house built in modern style close by. The recent land reforms had hit him hard. His jagir had been confiscated, and most of the land had gone to his tenants. He had some land along the river bed, but no cultivation was possible on account of wild cows. These creatures are agile like antelopes and are difficult to catch. When caught they lie down on the ground like *satyagrahis*, and it is difficult to remove them in trucks. Caught in a situation like this, the Raja thought of going to Japan to learn bamboo work, so that he could make some use of his bamboo forest. Commiserating over his misfortune we consoled him as best as we could.

It was quite dark when we returned to the rest house at Dehra Gopipore. On the way many foxes, jackals and wild cats cut across the road. The driver of the car was unhappy to see these animals of ill omen crossing the road. Next morning his forebodings were all but fulfilled when near Bharwain a jeep suddenly coming from the opposite direction on the wrong side of the road struck against our car damaging the bumper. But for the presence of mind of Raseel Singh, our cool-headed driver, we along with the car would have all rolled down into the gorge. After this accident all happy dreams about paintings vanished. Animated conversation on problems of Indian art abruptly ceased, and inside the car was a scared group of travellers, vigilant and looking out for trucks and jeeps. The driver was taking the precaution of sounding the hooter at every turn and corner. The noise no doubt robbed the mountain scenery of its charm. When we at last reached Hoshiarpur, we thanked God for granting us a fresh lease of life.

## Valley of Flowers and Tea Gardens

**W**E REACHED PALAMPUR late in the evening after a tiresome journey. Nothing is more welcome than a cup of hot tea when one is exhausted. After refreshing ourselves we were in a mood to admire our surroundings. Palampur with its pines and avenues of cedar is a gem among the hill-stations of the Himalayas. Its quiet walks shaded by pines, tea-gardens with irrigation channels brimming with ice-cold water, and its bungalows sheltered by pine trees give it a unique character. It is a picture of repose and loveliness. Of the numerous houses the Sessions House is undoubtedly the most picturesquely situated, and we stayed for the night in this place. Its site was probably selected by a lover of mountains. From the verandah we had a splendid view of the Dhauladhar. Framed by pine trees, the three mountain peaks covered with fresh snow against the background of a blue sky, appeared like a Roerich painting.

I always advise people who are new to India to have a massage, which we call *muthi chapi*, and to experience the feeling of exhilaration which follows it. As soon as I spread my bed, I was greeted by the chowkidar who was an expert in this art of massage. I asked him to give a taste of this ancient art of India to Galbraith. Next morning Galbraith informed me that it was indeed a delightful experience, and after an hour's kneading of muscles he shook off the fatigue of the journey and felt fresh. This reminds me of a meeting with an Indian princess in an air-liner at Rome. She was married to an Italian industrialist. I asked her what she missed most in Italy. She replied, "*muthi chapi* and *pulao*."

Palampur is interesting in all the seasons. During the rainy season there are tremendous displays of lightning accompanied by thunder. Reverberating rolls of thunder amplified by echoes in the Bandla valley sound like the voice of God in anger. Rainfall is very heavy and it pours like a sheet of water. The drama of the weather in the valley provides an unending source of enjoyment, and one can spend hours watching the hide-and-seek of the

clouds and snow-peaks. The giant clusters of turquoise-blue flowers of hydrangeas provided a heavenly contrast to the dark green leaves of the pines. The air was heavy with the fragrance of gardenias.

The mighty Dhauladhar in her shining majesty stood out like a wall, and a full panoramic view of the snow range could be had from here. The peaks were covered with fresh snow which shone like molten silver and glaciers fanned out into purple rocks and slopes covered with oaks and rhododendrons. By noon-time the clouds gathered and smothered all this loveliness and grandeur in their grey mantles. The play of sunshine and clouds on the mountain tops was enchanting. It was a drama with infinite variety which goes on throughout the day till the sun sets. The setting sun converted the peaks into molten gold which faded into pale pink and steel grey. At night the moon lent a peculiar charm to the mountain transforming its rugged peaks and softening the contours while the Palam valley with its numerous hamlets surrounded by paddy fields slumbered in repose.

Next morning we had a walk to Bandla village and Nigal gorge. An avenue of pines, borders the bridle road leading to this village, which has become famous in the history of Kangra. It was in this village that while out hunting Maharaja Sansar Chand met a Gaddan beauty whom he made his queen. Keeping to the right of the Bandla torrent we passed by a farmer's homestead, alongside which grows a solitary cypress. On the sides were Chinese tallow trees swathed in coppery leaves. The terraced fields were covered with crops of barley and wheat.

After wheat is harvested in the middle of May the fields are ploughed. Ploughing is followed by a clod-breaking operation and the farmers including their women folk and children, wielding wooden hammers with long handles, break clods of hard clay. In June the fields are flooded with water and small outlets are provided on one side of the terraces from which water pours out in hundreds of miniature waterfalls which glisten in the morning sun. The fields look like mirrors and the valley is transformed into a fairy land. Then the farmers sow paddy by broadcasting seed. In the months of August and September the fields are covered with a luxuriant crop of light green paddy. How soothing is the colour of young paddy! In the entire vegetable kingdom there is nothing to match it. Paddy is harvested in the month of October, and the straw is stored in the form of pyramidal stacks which dot the fields. Rice straw is also stacked in the forks of the branches of trees surrounding the houses of farmers.

At the outskirts of Bandla were the houses of Chamars, the landless labourers, now ennobled and called Harijans. In the heart of the village were the prosperous-looking houses of the Suds, who were bankers and shopkeepers. To the right was a temple with crude murals of Shiva and Parvati, the work of Gulabu Ram, a survivor of the Kangra school of painters. The main street was paved with stones, and in the middle was a water course brimming with crystal clear water. The flowing water lent charm to this village. Higher

up were the water mills and the houses of Gaddis. The trees which grew on the embankments of the fields were severely lopped for leaf fodder and their maimed branches furnished a weird foreground to the houses. The houses of the Gaddi farmers had a clean look and their outer walls were painted light-blue and light yellow with clay mined from the Dhauladhar. As we ascended we had a glimpse of the Nigal Khad, a tremendous chasm strewn with white boulders. In the middle of the gorge flows a crystal clear stream which takes its birth from the Dhauladhar. At the right flank is an irrigation channel, which viewed from distance appeared to be flowing from lower to a higher level. In the bed of the Nigal was a water-mill and a brewery where the Gaddis assembled for a drink of *lugri*, their home-brewed rice beer. On the opposite side was another village with box-like light yellow houses.

These villagers were farmers, shepherds and graziers as well as hunters. One of their occupations was netting of hawks from the Dhauladhar range and these were exported to west Punjab. A result of the partition of India has been that the export of hawks to West Punjab has come to a standstill. It is possible, that they are no longer required there, as the big landlords who used to keep them for sport are gradually becoming impecunious due to land reforms. As the hawks are no longer netted, they have multiplied, and have depleted the game in the forests of the Dhauladhar. The population of monals, koklass, kalij pheasants, jungle fowls and snow cocks has depleted alarmingly.

In the afternoon we trekked through the belt of tea-growing villages of the Palam valley of which Banuri, Saliana, and Khaira were the chief ones. Tea plants were introduced in 1849 by Dr. Jameson, the Superintendent of Botanical Gardens from the nurseries at Dehru Dun and Almora, and now tea-growing is a flourishing industry in the Kangra valley. Small landholders also grow tea. They dry tea leaves in small kilns and the hand-made product is relished by persons who patronise cottage industry and the small producers.

The villages are split into numerous hamlets, each consisting of a cluster of double-storeyed houses with slate roofs. Some of the houses have attractively carved doors and windows. Increasing attention has been paid to sanitation in the last twenty years or so, and windows and ventilators are more common than they used to be. Surrounding the hamlets are meadows on which flocks of diminutive black cows can be seen grazing.

Saliana was in a gay mood. I was visiting this village after many years. The villagers turned up in their best clothes, and the music of their drums and trumpets filled the valley. The colourful procession of hillmen and women viewed against the snow-covered mountain looked splendid. There was also an element of curiosity on both sides. While we were admiring the beauty of the hill women they also looked at us with a sense of wonder. Towering above the crowd was a tall American, our chief guest, Galbraith. They looked with

astonishment at him and some, as they followed him, were actually measuring his height with their outstretched hands. To their great delight, Galbraith picked up a small child from a woman and carried him on his shoulders. In front were the Gaddis beating drums and blowing trumpets. After a while Galbraith gave the child back to his mother, borrowed a drum from one of the drummers, and started drumming. Everyone was in a hilarious mood. The merry procession led by the informal American Ambassador reached the school building on the outskirts of the village, where we witnessed the folk dances and heard the songs of the hillmen.

Saliana was populated by Brahmins. The fields were fenced with hedges of wild roses and their pink, red and white colours lent great charm to the Valley. The medlars, which dotted the fields, were swathed in snow-white blossoms. Dhauladhar was covered with thick snow, and Palam valley appeared like a 'Woman in White'.

In the centre of the village was a fountain sheltered under a stone portico-like building. At the side of the fountain were numerous commemoration stones bearing images of men, women and bullocks. When a married man dies a commemoration stone bearing the image of a man is deposited in the fountain, and when a bachelor dies a stone with an image of a bullock is placed. This indicates in what low esteem bachelors were regarded in Kangra.

Outside the main village site were numerous homesteads. Most of the farmers prefer to live in their fields and choose for their cottages sites open to the sun and sheltered from the wind. The dwellings of the Rajputs could be easily singled out from the rest, for they select elevated and isolated sites for their houses, where their women can enjoy seclusion. In the early insecure days, the Rajputs felt safe from the raids of their neighbours, in their dwellings perched on steep hill-sides, which were approached by a long flight of stone steps, sometimes so narrow that they were impassable even for a horse.

The houses of some of the farmers were located in the fields buried in clumps of bamboos, baubinsias, with an occasional wild cherry or an apricot. These scattered homesteads were pictures of sylvan elegance which beautified landscape. They looked particularly attractive against the background of snow-covered mountains. Lower down, plantain and mango trees were seen. On the outskirts were giant silk cotton trees bearing scarlet red flowers on their gaunt leafless branches.

A ride through these villages was full of scenic interest. On leaving Saliana, we passed through a meadow dotted with shops and houses. A fair is held on the meadow in the month of April when the place is covered with shanties of shopkeepers who sell sweetmeats, bangles, necklaces of beads, brass utensils, and pots and pitchers of all varieties. Necklaces of beads are very popular with hill women, as they admire them passionately. Apart from the Brahmins, the Rajputs and the Ghiraths of Palam valley, a large number of Gaddis, both men and women also attend the fair, adding colour and gaiety. To the sound of drums the Gaddis dance

intoxicated with generous doses of country liquor and inspired by the beauty of their women folk, who, laden with silver ornaments, stand at a distance watching them.

## Two Recluses

**A**FTER DESCENDING A slope we climbed again and passed through tea-gardens. The paddy fields of Andretta studded with apricots and medlars covered with pink and white blossoms were now in sight.

On account of its solitude and pure water springs, Andretta had attracted two recluses: One is Sobha Singh, the artist, who has built a cottage close to the road at the entrance of the village. Like Tagore, Sobha Singh has a long flowing beard and keeps bare-headed. He paints in oil colours on canvas in the realistic style. He had settled at Andretta with the idea of reviving Kangra painting. However, his medium and technique are different, though his oil portraits of hill women have delicacy and charm. Moreover every art is the product of its environment including the social and economic set-up. Kangra painting flourished due to the patronage of the Rajas: this exists no more. Hence there is no possibility of the revival of Kangra painting. However, it was Sobha Singh who brought to my notice some of the collections of Kangra paintings in the Valley.

The prominent feature of Sobha Singh's house was a small circular mound surrounded by a moat. On the mound he had planted a bamboo pole for performing the flag-hoisting ceremony on Independence Day. Apart from portraits of the Sikh Gurus, Sobha Singh has painted some lovely paintings of Gaddi women. We stayed for a while and had a cup of tea with him. After taking leave of Sobha Singh we went to the other end of the village to see the 'Woodland Estate' of Mrs Norah Richards.

At the entrance was a forbidding notice 'No Visitors'. To my surprise I was received with great cordiality by Mrs Richards. Woodlands was at its best. The wisterias were flowering and we sat under a bamboo arbour decorated with racemes of blue and white flowers. The blue wisteria is delightful to look at while the white one has a delicate fragrance.

Norah was an admirer of Walt Whitman and believes in simple living with the minimum needs. It was Whitman's *Leaves of Grass* which she regarded as her Bible, and she had selected Andretta for her experiment in the art of simple living and solitude.



I learnt that she was born on 29 October, 1876, at Gorawood in Ireland. She had her education at Oxford and Sydney. She had considerable experience as an actress in England and was known as Norah Doyle. She came under the influence of B. Iden Pyne, now of the Drama Department, University of Texas and became a Tolstoyan. Leaving the stage for good she retired to Woodlands in Dorset. Working with her own hands and identifying herself completely with the lives of fellow villagers, she lived a life of extreme simplicity. To earn her living she also ran a Nature Cure Home. It was at Woodlands that she met Philip Ernest Richards. They were married in 1908 and in 1911 they came to Lahore. Richards was appointed Professor of English Literature at Dayal Singh College. In 1911 she set up a successful School of Punjabi Drama. She trained a number of college students in acting and play-writing. In fact, among her numerous achievements, her contribution to Punjabi drama has an important place in the history of Punjabi literature.

During the First World War, Professor Richards became the guardian and tutor of the Yuvraj, son of the late Maharaja of Dewas Senior (the hero of E.M. Forster's *Hill of Devi*.)

In 1920 Professor Richards died and Mrs Richards left India for the U.K. She lived for a while in Exeter in Devonshire and later, at Chelsea in London. Here, she created beauty out of most modest materials that amazed many a visitor.

At that time a film called *Through Romantic India* with a commentary by Lowel Thomas was running at the Philharmonic Hall. Mrs Richards felt that the film was unfair to India. While it was being shown she interrupted the display by denouncing Lord Reading when he appeared on the screen. As he had doubled the Salt Tax she called him a villain. She also broke a showcase. She was arrested, tried and awarded a month's imprisonment in Holloway Jail. After her release she left Chelsea to undertake domestic service with her mother-in-law at Hampstead Garden. She saved enough money to pay her passage back to India.

She returned to India in 1924 inspired by the ideas of Dr L.P. Jacks on cultural civilization. She was convinced in her belief that India was destined to inaugurate a cultural civilization.

She settled at Banuri, a village on the Palampur-Mandi road in the Kangra Valley. Later, she shifted to Andretta, "a place fragrant with cleanliness, simplicity and beauty," where she lived till her death in 1970.

The Dhauladhar in her shining majesty stands out like a wall and a full panoramic view of the range can be had from Andretta. The peaks of the Dhauladhar covered with fresh snow shine like molten silver. The setting sun converts the peaks into molten gold which fade into pale pink and steel grey. At night the moon lends a peculiar charm to the snows transforming the rugged peaks and softening the contours while the Palam valley with its numerous hamlets surrounded by paddy fields, slumbers in repose.

It is the Dhauladhar which provides the background to the dramas of Norah Richards. Across the *khad* opposite the Woodland Estate a farmer has built a homestead, partly marring the view of the Valley. Norah has planted a row of poplars to screen the farmer's homestead. She hoped to live long enough to see the poplars grow into a wall of green and white between the Woodlands and the farmer's unsightly house in the Valley. Norah herself lived in a double-storeyed dwelling with a slate roof which she had constructed according to her own ideas of house-building. Rooms were mud-plastered from both the inside and outside and they looked neat and tidy. Seats were provided under the shade of trees and proved handy when members of the Woodland community and friends from the village gathered for tea. In the room below were stored earthen pitchers in which wheat and paddy grain, the produce of the estate, was stored and garden umbrellas made of leaves hung on the ground floor opening towards the garden. A rambling wisteria covered the entrance to the room and the bamboo trellis, in front of the hut. In April it was covered with purple-mauve racemes of great beauty. In the garden there were a few apricots, and a mulberry which produced an abundant crop of purple black mulberries, the size of straw-berries. A few rose bushes and spiraeas planted informally completed the lovely and restful garden.

During winter she lived in the second storey of the house, in a small room in which she had stored all her necessities. Most of the time she rested in a small bed. Frail and aged, she appeared like a mountain spirit when she was in repose. However, when she sat up and started talking, a strange light shone in her eyes, and her face framed by white silken locks brightened up. The pet subject of her conversation was Culture versus Power, she being an advocate of culture in this power-mad world. On her seat near the window was a blue vase with deep yellow sun-flowers brightening the room. Her companion on the Estate was Jai Dayal, a retired Professor who was also keen on drama. After a long spell of quiet and rest when she was in need of company, she shouted to Jai Dayal on a megaphone and Jai Dayal promptly responded to her call.

On one side of the balcony was the study-room furnished with jute curtains. The only furniture apart from mats is a small writing table and a chair. Even the ventilators were provided with *khaddar* cloth instead of glass panes. The jute curtains harmonise with the colour of the mud plaster. Some people decry the *kachcha* house and mud-plaster. If one wanted to see their beauty one should have seen Norah's home at Andretta. After all the colour of the earth is brown and mud plaster harmonises with it. Neatly plastered mud houses are the children of the mother earth, the true sons of the soil, unlike the atrocities of burnt bricks inflicted on the earth.

Surrounding her house were a number of miscellaneous buildings which she had raised. On one side was 'Badami Niwas' named after a favourite pony. It now served as a boarding house for school teachers who came to Wood-

lands for short courses in Drama and Culture. On the other, was the Hermitage which was lately occupied by an Irish author and his Indian wife who stayed at Andretta for a couple of months. At the base of the hill was the Bedis' Hut, now in ruins. It was built by B.P.L. and Freda Bedi. After the builders had left Woodlands, this hut proved a source of endless trouble to Norah; to protect a fallen beam she built another hut. At this end of the Estate there was a gap in the fence and the village cattle freely trespassed, disturbing the peace of Woodlands.

Mrs Richards felt very concerned about the future of Woodlands. It was her desire that it should be maintained as a Cultural Centre in the Kangra Valley. From time to time she had been drawing her will in favour of persons whom she fancied as suitable successors. For a while I also figured as a legatee. Next year when I paid her a visit I learnt that the will had been changed again. I shared her concern for Woodlands, a place fragrant with art and beauty. Besides, no other place in India commands such a wonderful view of snow-covered mountains.

I thought of Sorensen whom I knew in Almora, as a possible successor. A Dane by birth, Sorensen or Viking Bhai as he called himself joined the Shantiniketan of Tagore as a gardener in 1935. After some time he drifted to Almora where I saw him first in 1939. He was clad in a saffron chogha, wearing a turban, walking bare-footed towards the Kalimat, the cranks ridge as it was called. He had selected a cave as his abode and provided it with a door. His sole companion was a spaniel whom he called Chowji in his letters. Recently, I received an unhappy letter from him in which he stated that while he was travelling in the plains, his cave was invaded by a gang of hippies. He wrote as follows:

*"Here we are back again with Wuji and Sri Himalaya. We enjoyed every day during the two months gallivanting in the plains of Hindusthan. They are also Bharat, though not Himalayas. We slept well also in asuric homes and all the bodies kept fit and flexible at play. Now, coming back to our erstwhile peaceful sanctuary, we have often sleep-free nights and headachy, jarring days. We accept and cope with the new Himalayan disease, which Wuji calls Hippie-titis. It has an asuric hue and flavour—but it is not fatal. Sunya and Sri Himalaya will survive, says Sri Wuji. Rape, poison and malignant, violent destruction were suffered and endured—and permitted—in the Sunya sanctuary during our body-absence, but the Real is not hurt or maimed by egojis. It is not the material destruction—(only few hundred rupees) which jars and mars the play. Except for the two broken gates and doors we can repair the damage (or do without) in solitary Self-play, but the obvious fact of open-hostility and spiteful mischief inflicted on Sunya realm by the western-conditioned Yankee-youths, whom we had sheltered and befriended. Our local native criminals do not steal books—(or have not done so in the six previous assaults). Now seven precious books are missing: Swami Omananda's and Miguel Serrant's gifts to us and to the world—and no use to Hippiejis. Four taps on the watertanks had been maliciously left open. So we are water-free until July.*

*A large portrait of Ramana Maharishi (over the mantelpiece during thirty years) burnt or otherwise destroyed, and the usual unholy mess we had days to clear up after the Hippiescenes and orgies in the sanctuary. Sri Wuji must have barked lustily, but as the drugged, lusty youth were not clear-voyant or clear-audient in their psychodelic orgasms, it was of no avail—and, anyhow the Real cannot be raped or destroyed. Hippies come and go, but Sri Himalaya remains—and smiles.*

*Sunya realm is again fairly calm and whole after the Hippie assault. The gates and doors repaired or renewed and the unholy Hippie mess cleared up. All the winter-rain ran to waste in Hippie-play. Patricia Van Ingen, who again sheltered in the Wu Vihara sanctuary, has fled after only seven weeks there: A victim of Hippietitis. Of all the Himalayan Hill-Stations Almora and our cranky ridge seem to have been selected by Sri Bhagavan to be blessed or inflicted with Hippiescenes a la Goa, Varanasi and Kathmandu and it is not the best type that overflows upon us. Swell egojis play at being gods and there are criminal and suicidal types among them, though some of them die 'naturally' due to immaturity and excess of drug-addictions. But Sri Himalaya will survive, healing some and expelling others. Hippietitis is not fatal and can have some nuisance value in Himalaya.*

*Peterson and Niels are two Danes, (but not Great Danes), who may come and shelter in the Karuna Cottage---, and so brave Hippie-vibrations! We admit them as inmates, not because they are Danes, but because we feel that they may be safely 'dead'—, or at least have experienced ego-humiliation or ego-oblivion and so be able to keep a Silence well and drug-freely. Silence is the language of Wholeness and Grace in the invisible, egofree Real, says Wuji: The Silence of desire—,craving and egowilfulness, and also of the blinkered ego-conceit of agency. Wu. What is the use of Power-Antics and mere knowledge, erudition and beliefs, if we do not awaken integrally to be aware and to experience essence and wholeness in Self-hood, the microcosm within?" Who and what are ye-egojis?" asks Sri Wuji, and he dons his inscrutable sphinxy mien and Mona Lisa smile, but usually he lets Ananda bubble up at playful, joyous ease."*

*Sunya.*

On reading the letter I thought it was time that Sunyata or Mr Zero, as he signs his name, had a change and moved on from Kalimat to Andretta.

"Why don't you invite Sorensen here? He can be your worthy successor." I asked.

"If Sorensen comes here," said Mrs Richards, "I will tell him, No holiness here—you have been a gardener, you dig tomatoes."

Sorensen who was my annual visitor met me during winter, and I told him what Mrs Richards had said. Having been a *sadhu* for so long, Sorensen had no intention of digging tomatoes and he declined the offer.

The dream of Mrs Richards that the Kangra Valley should become an educational and cultural centre has been partly realized. A college of agriculture with a unique architecture which harmonizes with the mountains, has been built. If the scheme for the Biological Research Laboratory, which was initiated by Dr Hussain Zaheer, had not aborted, the valley would have

been on the science map of the world. However, no jealous hands can deprive her of her place on the art map of the world. Her artists of the 18th century by their paintings of imperishable beauty which have been admired by art lovers the world over, have ensured her the same place of honour as a centre of art as Florence or Paris. Mrs Richard's great experiment in the art of living in the Kangra Valley, has a message for all men and women of culture, who are living tortured lives in our large cities. When they have earned enough to be economically independent, they should go back to their villages. What Voltaire's hero Candide learnt after undergoing many adventures was that we should live with Nature

## The Eighth Wonder of the World

“**H**AVE YOU SEEN the eighth wonder of the world?” asked Parmeshwari Das. “It is only an hour’s jeep drive from here in village Maniara,” he added. I had packed my luggage and was ready to leave Palampur for Mandi to see the agricultural work which had been going on in that district of Himachal Pradesh under an Indo-German aid project. I had already admired the snow-covered mountains and the Palam valley, green with a bumper crop of wheat. What could be more beautiful than what I had already seen and enjoyed? Ignoring the prospect of a late arrival at Mandi, I accepted the suggestion of Parmeshwari Das, as his information about places in the Kangra Valley was always reliable.

We left Palampur at 8.30 a.m. and after a couple of miles diverged to the left. We were on the familiar road to Tira Sujampur and soon reached Bhavarna. There the metalled road ended, and we were on a kutchra track which ran through tea gardens. After a short distance the road was no longer smooth but was strewn with pebbles. I was beginning to regret having accepted this invitation when I had a long journey in front of me with people waiting at different places.

The road dipped down to the level of a *khud*, and from here a remarkable view of the Dhauladhar was before us. Below the white mountains was a stretch of terraced fields, covered with dark green and pale green strips of wheat. The dark green wheat had been fertilised with calcium ammonium nitrate and superphosphate and held the promise of a bumper crop. The pale green wheat was not fertilized and had a poor stand, the size of the ears being small. The pale colour of the wheat plants indicated how deficient the soil was in plant nutrients, particularly nitrogen. The production of fertilized wheat would easily be three to four times as much as that of the pale green wheat, raised according to traditional methods. It is thus that nitrogen is changing the landscape of the Punjab Himalayas. It has not only provided a new colour to the landscape but has also added

more wheat to the granary of the farmer. It has made four ears of wheat grow in the place of one and these are also larger in size. There is a saying in Germany that when one ear of wheat has 11 grains in a row, the farmer can go on a holiday by himself; when there are 12 grains in one ear he can go on a holiday with his wife, and when he has 13 grains he can go on a holiday with his girl friend. In Balh valley in Mandi, and in some villages in Palampur, there are quite a number of farmers who have qualified for holidays with their girl friends. The hill farmer, who has adopted the full package of practices, has now more to eat and also a surplus to sell in the market, to repay the price of fertilizers which the Government had given him on loan under the newly-started scheme of intensive agriculture. 'Was this the eighth wonder of the world which Parmeshwari had in mind when he led us into this unfrequented tract of Kangra?' I wondered.

The planners carry on an interminable discussion about the measures to overcome the food crisis in India. This crisis is mainly the result of reckless increase in population. Since we became independent, we have added 11 crore more human beings to our population, and every year we are adding more than a crore of new mouths. Many more people are born, and fewer die. This imbalance is the result of the use of modern medicines, particularly antibiotics, which have lowered the death rate remarkably.

Experience has shown that a kilo of nitrogen applied to soil will give an additional yield of 15 kilos of cereals. If phosphorus and potassium are also added according to requirements, the increase will be much more. If one million tonnes of nitrogen is applied to the food crops, India's deficit in cereals would be eliminated. The soils of India are starved of nitrogen due to continuous cultivation over centuries. This is the penalty we have to pay for our ancient civilization. However, the response which our soils show to NPK is marked, and even remarkable. The present production of cereals can be doubled almost anywhere and in some areas it can easily be increased 3-4 times. This is the lesson which the scheme of intensive agriculture, also called the Package Programme, has taught us. An average farmer in Kangra produces six maunds of wheat per acre, a good farmer using traditional methods produces 14 maunds per acre, while farmers who have applied the full package, including improved and treated seed and fertilizers have produced 30 maunds per acre. In the plains of Punjab many farmers in Ludhiana have produced 40 maunds per acre.

Low yields of crop per acre in India are harped upon, by the students of Indian agriculture. As compared with our low yields, the high yields of Japan and the European countries are constantly dangled before us. It is not that the Japanese farmers are more hard-working and intelligent than the farmers in a number of States in India, but Japan manufactures 1.5 million tonnes of nitrogen which gives an average of 15 kg per inhabitant. If we could have 15 kg of nitrogen per inhabitant, our farmers could give similar performance. The solution of this problem is NPK. The sooner

we have it in the quantity which our cereal crops require, the better would it be for the economy of India.

Apologising for the digression, let me resume the account of my journey. Negotiating steep climbs we ultimately reached the small village of Maniara, built on a plateau. A large number of men, women and children had assembled to welcome us. Among them was a group of Gaddis beating *nagara* drums, and blowing trumpets. Two of them were playing on bagpipes. The sound of the bagpipes and the kilts of Gaddis added a touch of Scotland to the scene. The young women of Kangra seated on platforms of stones under banyan trees made a charming picture. These women with their clear complexions and chiselled features reminded me of the Kangra paintings. Some of them seemed to have stepped right out of them. How serene and beautiful they looked with their faces decorated with large noserings!

There was a large oval pool of water on one side and in it was reflected the white snow range of the Dhauladhar. The pool had recently been stocked with mirror carp brought from the hatchery at Barot near Bilaspur. Though I have wandered extensively in the Himalayas from Almora to Srinagar, I had not so far seen a spectacle of such majesty. I could not take my eyes off this scene of sublime beauty. The air was full of fragrance of the garna floweres. The Kangra women in their colourful clothes decorated the hillside like Alpine blossoms. Where could one see a scene of such grandeur and beauty which satisfied all at once the senses of sight, smell and hearing! It was an intoxicating scene and I forgot myself and wanted to linger on.

Karam Chand, the Sarpanch of the village now mounted a platform below a banyan tree and thus addressed us. "We are poor hill men of Kangra who live in one of the most picturesque valleys of the Himalayas. Many of us are oblivious of the beauty of the mountains, for only people whose bellies are full can admire beauty in nature. The scheme of intensive agriculture under which the use of fertilizers has been promoted, has shown us the way to fill our empty stomachs. The use of nitrogen has increased our wheat yields four-fold. We do not want a road or a hospital. Our only demand is, that the price of fertilizers should be reduced so that they may be used by more of our farmers, who have small holdings. We are poor people and have nothing material to offer you on your first visit to our village. We have, however, one gift to offer you, if you care to accept it. We present to you, sir, the finest scene in the world," he concluded, pointing towards the reflection of the white snowcovered mountain in the pool.

"I accept your present with the greatest joy, my friend," I replied. "People come from long distances to admire the reflection of the Taj Mahal in the tank in front of it. Taj Mahal is the creation of man, while your Dhauladhar is the creation of God. You have provided a mirror to the White Mountain so that she could admire her own beauty. Truly, you have shown me the eighth wonder of the world," I concluded with my eyes glued on the reflection of the mountain in the pool.



The Dhauladhar was admiring her narcissian beauty in the pool of water, which the people of Maniara had created by their labour. The beauty of the mountain was truly breathtaking! All the same I was left guessing as to which wonder I should admire more, the miracle of nitrogen on the crops, or the grandeur of the white mountain reflected in the pool of Maniara.

## Gaddis, the Shepherds of Dhauladhar

**W**HO ARE THESE strange people, the Gaddis, who look so distinctive from all hill people, and seem to have nothing in common with the Punjabis of the plains? It would surprise most Punjabis that the Gaddis are their cousins who migrated from the plains about three centuries ago. The term Gaddi is generic, and includes people from all castes such as the Brahmins, the Rajputs, the Khattris, and the Harijans. However, the majority of them are Khattris, and among them may be found sub-castes such as Kapurs, Malhotras, etc. The Dhauladhar provided sanctuary to all types of people who sought to escape the tyranny and oppression of their rulers. The traditional belief is that the ancestors of the Gaddis migrated from Lahore during the reign of Aurangzeb when proselytism to Islam was at its height. They refused to accept Islam, opted to leave their hearths and homes for good, and took refuge in the forests of the Dhauladhar range of Chamba and Kangra. They have maintained a distinct cultural pattern of their own, and have so far escaped the levelling effect of modern education. Their economy is selfcontained, their dress has individuality, and they have retained ancient customs and rituals which can no longer be seen in the plains of the Punjab.

Their houses are neat and clean with the walls plastered with yellow clay, and from a distance they look like cardboard boxes neatly arranged in rows on the hill-side. While their habitations are at altitudes of 4,000 to 8,000 feet, they graze their flocks of sheep and goats in the oak and rhododendron forests higher up, as well as in the Alpine pastures below the crest of the Dhauladhar.

The southern aspect of the Dhauladhar, facing Kangra Valley, is steep and precipitous, rising almost perpendicularly from the low ranges at its base. The lower slopes are covered with forests of pine and oak, while higher up the lofty peaks rise in rugged grandeur covered by snow, or shoot up in pinnacles of bare granite, which are too steep for the snow to rest on.

The northern aspect of the Dhauladhar facing Chamba is studded with Alpine pastures. The mountain sides are much less precipitous, and the spurs slope gradually to the banks of the Ravi. This is the home of the Chamba Gaddis. Here among the rhododendrons covered with bunches of red blossoms are seen comely Gaddi maidens decked in silver ornaments and necklaces of amber, tending flocks of sheep. These are the mountains where in the month of September rain falls in a gentle spray, and rainbows decorate the crests of mountains like the crescent moon on the brow of Shiva. With such gorgeous landscape and colourful people, who will not be in love with the hills of Chamba? It is thus that a folk-song describes them.

*Gori* (the fair maiden) is deeply in love  
 With the hills of Chamba.  
 In every home a goat  
 In every home a sheep  
 In every home are comely brides.  
*Gori* is deeply in love  
 With the hills of Chamba.  
 In the hills of Chamba  
 Are ever-falling showers,  
 Life is lovely among the dear ones  
*Gori* is deeply in love  
 With the hills of Chamba  
 The Raja of Chamba  
 Wants to be gratified  
 He is eager for the sheen of the lovely eyes.  
*Gori* is deeply in love  
 With the hills of Chamba.

Gaddi shepherds and farmers are equally at home in Chamba and Kangra, as many of them have homes on both sides of the Dhauladhar, and they continue to move freely from one territory to the other, when the passes are not snow-bound. Marriages are often contracted between Gaddi families living on the opposite sides of the Dhauladhar. In a charming folk-song the Gaddi bride living in her father-in-law's house on the Chamba side of the mountain remembers her parents' home on the Kangra side. She personifies the Dhauladhar as a dame and asks her to bend a little so that she may have a glimpse of her parents' home.

O Mother Dhauladhar  
 Bend a little,  
 O bend a little.  
 On this side lies my mother-in-law's place,

On the other side lies my father's home.  
 Bend a little,  
 O bend a little.  
 On the marriage day in a palanquin  
 My brother gave me a farewell  
 'Bathe in milk, Blossom in sons!'  
 My brother's wife blessed me,  
 My mother gave me tears.  
 Bend a little,  
 So that I may see  
 My parents' home.

The Gaddis are a simple, honest and virtuous race known for their eminent regard for truth. Their simplicity can be judged from the fact that in the early days of British rule, whenever they were fined by the Kangra authorities they would pay a similar penalty into the Chamba treasury, as they were subjects of both. But for the forest offences which are committed by nearly all the hill people, crime is almost unknown among them. They are lively and cheerful, and on festive occasions and marriages they get together and spend their time singing and dancing. On such occasions they consume large quantities of *lugri*, their native liquor.

The Gaddis can easily be distinguished from the other hill-tribes by their peculiar clothes. They wear a loose frock of white wool (*chola*), secured round the waist with yards of black woollen ropes. Their head-dress is a high-peaked cap which they pull over the ears in the severe cold of high altitudes. Their legs are usually bare. In their *cholas* the Gaddis store many articles; they can be seen carrying one or two newly-born lambs, with their innocent faces peering out of the folds of their garments. They also carry in their *cholas* walnuts and their meals tied in leather pouches. Men are fond of jewelry which they wear on their necks.

The women, who are called Gaddans, wear a woollen frock and a petticoat, usually printed in red. Their dress is described in the song of the *bhaura*, the male bumble-bee which is the symbol of the lover in Indian poetry.

Red is your turban, O bumble-bee  
 With an aigrette of peacock feathers  
 The shepherdess of Chamba, O bumble-bee  
 How does she dress herself?  
 The pattu shawl, O bumble-bee  
 With joji she covers her head.  
 The shepherdess of Chamba, O bumble-bee  
 What does she eat?  
 The maize bread, O bumble-bee  
 With the cooked phaphur leaves,

The pattu shawl, O bumble-bee,  
 Who has woven?  
 The brother has woven, O bumble-bee  
 The brother's wife has woven.

The Gaddis are fond of their traditional dress; that is why it continues unchanged. The Gaddi girl says: "*Salwar* may suit the Ranis, but this garment is not acceptable to us, as we love our *pahari* clothes." The women are very fond of brightly coloured silk handkerchiefs, which they display with great eagerness. They also prefer to see their men-folk in their *chola* and peaked cap. Thus says Sali Tundeï to her lover Mali Sahnũ:

A red, red turban do not put on,  
 Oh Mali Sahnũ!  
 People will say you are a dyer  
 Bring rice of Bhati,  
 Oh Mali Sahnũ.  
 Do not take the contract of Kugti,  
 Oh Mali Sahnũ!  
 People will say you are a contractor  
 Oh Mali Sahnũ!

A study of their folk-songs reveals a rich emotional life the like of which cannot be seen in any other hill tribe of the Punjab Himalayas. Open-air life, health-giving diet of milk and flesh, and a hardy existence have combined to produce a race of people who have a healthy and cheerful approach to life. Their unconventional nature is reflected in their folk-songs. In the pastures, young men and girls get opportunities of meeting each other, and love affairs often develop. The sorrow in a woman's heart on the demise of her lover, and the gap which it leaves in her words is described in the following song:

If the husband dies,  
 One may wander;  
 If the lover dies,  
 How can you live?  
 If a blanket is torn,  
 One may put on a patch,  
 If the sky is torn,  
 How can you sew it?

The Dhauladhar and its snow-covered peaks figure in many gaddi songs and it is obvious that the Gaddis are conscious of its beauty and grandeur. The Dhauladhar is addressed as 'Mother Mountain' for it provides

pastures for their goats, fuel, and food. It gives birth to numerous springs which make the Palam Valley sparkle like a mosaic of mirrors. "Oh Mother Dhauladhar, you have made Kangra a paradise," sings the Gaddi minstrel. Addressing the goddess Jawalaji, a reference is made to Akbar who draped in flame-like crimson clothes, with a saffron mark on his fore-head, came bare-footed, with a golden umbrella to appease the offended goddess.

Gaddis are the worshippers of Shiva who is believed to have his abode on the Kailash peak at Mani Mahesh, the loftiest peak in this region. Brahmaur is also called Shiva Bhumi or Shiva's land. According to the Gaddis, Shiva resides on the Kailash peak for six months, and in October he moves down to Piyalpur, where he lives till the month of March. These are the months in which the Gaddis migrate from their winter pastures to their summer pastures.

Gaddis also worship the spirits of mountains, forests and earth. When a storm rages on a mountain pass, or avalanches move on the sides of the mountains with a roar, sweeping rocks and stones, demons are said to be fighting with one another. When the Gaddis cross a pass of the Dhauladhar, they pray to the deity of the pass for fair weather and safe passage for their flocks. The deity of the pass has his abode in the cairn, decorated with flags. Out of respect for the god, no one speaks till the top of the pass is reached. Pilgrims from the plains often invite destruction by talking loudly, which is said to offend the god of the pass, who hurls avalanches on these noisy intruders.

In the forest trees are said to reside the spirits of the ancient heroes—the ban-birs. The tun, kainth, semal, and the walnut trees are said to be the favourite abodes of these spirits of the forest. Kala-bir and Narsingh are said to visit women in the absence of their husbands. If the husband returns while the bir is in human form, he is sure to die unless a sacrifice is offered to propitiate the offended spirit. On the mountain slopes lives Khealu-bir who rolls landslips when in anger. Living on high mountain slopes are *banasts*, or female spirits, the guardians of cattle, who are propitiated when the cattle are sent to the grazing grounds in summer. Batal is the spirit of the Springs. Rivers and water-falls are propitiated by an offering of *khichri*, sodden Indian corn, balls of moss ashes, water, and a pumpkin. When new ground is broken for the first time, four young girls are taken to the spot, heads painted red, and they are given *gur* to eat. The first fruits of newly-broken land are offered to the god. In front of every Gaddi house is a platform on which the presiding deity of the household is placed and worshipped.

Apart from these miscellaneous deities, Nags and Devis are also worshipped. Kailung, the father of all the snakes is worshipped in the form of a sickle which is always carried by a Gaddi when shepherding his flocks. Different days are dedicated to different deities, such as Shiva, devis, birs, nags and siddhas.

If the economy of any agricultural tribe can be called self-sufficient,

it is that of the Gaddis. Their staple food is barley, which is grown in their fields. Parched barley grain is ground into flour, and is consumed during their journeys in the inner Himalayas. For sugar, they mostly use honey. Apart from occasional use of the flesh of goats and sheep, their chief food is goat's milk which they consume in large quantities. They prefer the crude salt of the Guman mines of Mandi. For their clothing they depend upon the wool of their sheep which their women-folk spin and weave. Dressed in their white woollen frocks, and wearing high-peaked caps, they resemble the Anglo-Saxon farmers and shepherds of the sixth century. Their shaggy black dogs with dented iron collars are their constant companions, and some of them have had successful encounters with leopards. The spiked iron collars save their necks from being mauled by leopards.

The Gaddi shepherds remain in the Kangra Valley for about six months in winter, and in Lahaul Valley for the same period in summer. They are careful and energetic shepherds, not afraid of the hazards of the journey. It takes them about a month to reach Lahaul from Kangra. Though they are acquainted with every sheep and goat of their flock, sometimes a few of the sheep and goats stray away, and are lost. At night, fires can be seen against the faces of precipitous rocks. These are the Gaddis resting with their flocks. They light fire to scare away leopards and, to get warm. Wearing a woollen coat and a blanket, they sometimes sleep out, exposed to icy winds, and are none the worse for their experience. Sometimes, they creep into the huddled flocks, placing two or three sheep over them as a quilt. During the rains they creep into rock shelters, which are fairly common in the Himalayas. Their sheep are strong and hardy, and even Bhotia traders from Kumaon buy a large number of them at high prices to serve as beasts of burden, for the trade between the snowy ranges of Kumaon and Tibet. Gaddi shepherds grazing their sheep and goats in the boulder-studded Palam Valley present a very pleasing picture. For lovers of pastoral beauty, it is a sight never to be forgotten.

The grazing grounds or sheep-runs of shepherds in Lahaul are called *dhar*s or *bans*. A *dhar* or a *ban* is often sub-divided into several *vands*, each *vand* containing enough ground to graze one full flock of sheep and goats. Each *dhar* has its more or less precisely fixed boundaries, and the title to it, is understood to have originated in a grant from a Raja of Kulu, or a Thakur of Lahaul. Among the Gaddis some transfers by gift or sale appear to have taken place, and in several cases the original family which obtained the grant has long ceased to use the *dhar*; but in recognition of its old title, the shepherd in possession has to halt a day on the return journey and let his sheep manure the fields of the original owner, with whose permission his occupation commenced. The Gaddi shepherds give one or more sheep for each run as tax to the Thakur of the *kothi*, or to the *negi*, the village headman. Most of the Gaddi shepherds also give a sheep or two to the men of the next village below their run. Such sheep are sacrificed

and eaten in a village feast which the shepherds attend.

Gaddi children charm the visitor by their innocence. Clad in tattered clothes, some of them with their charming smiles create an aura of happiness. Their fondness for beads and bangles marks them out from other hill people. Even small girls are laden with them. Girls at the early age of ten or twelve tie the black woollen rope around their waists.

Gaddi women are well-known in the Punjab Himalayas for their beauty. An open air life, milk diet, and Aryan descent explain their good looks. Their features are regular and refined, noses are straight, eyes are bright, complexion is olive-white and expression mild and engaging.

The Gaddi tends his sheep on the grass;  
The Gaddan offers incense to Shiva;  
To the Gaddi Shiva gives sheep,  
On the Gaddan He bestows beauty.

Unlike the Rajput and Brahmin women of Palam Valley they are bright and cheerful, and some of them look like queens of the mountains. Their beauty is the theme of many a hill-song. How Maharaja Sansar Chand, the well-known patron of Kangra painting fell in love with a pretty Gaddi girl and made her his Rani is described in the song below:

The Gaddi was grazing his goats;  
The Gaddi girl was grazing her cows;  
Seeing her young face,  
The Raja loved her.

On festive occasions the Gaddis amuse themselves by dancing and singing. The Gaddi dance is accompanied by the beating of huge drums. In some cases they dance to the tune of bag-pipes, like the Highlanders. Men and boys participate in the dance, while women are only spectators. The women deck themselves with ornaments, and come to the dance dressed in their best clothes. No doubt by their presence they inspire the men, who continue to whirl round for long hours. When the men-folk leave for the dance, which is a tough performance requiring plenty of stamina, they eat a hearty meal and have a good long drink of their rice-beer, *lugri*. How a Gaddi girl treats her lover Sambhu, before he goes for the dance is described in the song below:

With a black girdle and a white *chola*,  
Oh mother! Sambhu has come."  
Oh Sambhu, my first dancer!  
Oh Sambhu! Stop a while.



Stay on, my life!  
 Bread of wheat, *ghī* and *dāl*,  
 Oh Sambhu eat before you go;  
 Eat before you go, my life!  
 I am spreading a shawl  
 Oh Sambhu sleep before you go;  
 Sleep before you go, my life!  
 Oh Sambhu! Sleep before you go."

Kunju and Chanchalo are the Gaddi lovers, and duets sung by Gaddi-boys commemorate their romance. Kunju used to visit his sweetheart Chanchalo at midnight after crossing a torrent and passing through a forest infested by wild animals. However, the wild animals were not so dangerous as the rivals of Kunju. Chanchalo warns him not to go out at night time as his enemies were armed with guns. Chanchalo's dream of domestic bliss, and her desire for living in a house with doors and windows fitted with glass panes is expressed in a charming couplet:

On the hill there is sunshine, O Kunju,  
 On the stream it rains,  
 We will go to the hill-top, O Kunju,  
 On the hill-top we will build a bungalow.

Chanchalo washes clothes at the spring. She is sad as she has learnt that Kunju is leaving for the distant Lahaul. She asks him for a keepsake. Kunju gives her his turquoise ring, and she gives him a sky-blue handkerchief.

## Palace in the Forest of Snakes

ON LEARNING THAT Raja Dhruv Dev Chand of Lambagraon, has one of the collections of paintings of his ancestor, Sansar Chand, we decided to pay him a visit at his forest retreat at Maharaj Nagar. We left Andretta early in the morning and passed through the hamlet of Dattal. The hedges along the road were studded with pink roses and white jasmine. The air was filled with the fragrance of the *garna* flower. Admiring the wild roses and the jasmines we reached the picturesque village of Parha. A large number of hoary banyan trees give an appearance of age to this village. Below the grove of banyans are three streams of water flowing parallel to the village street. The banyan is indeed an astounding piece of vegetation; heavy crown of dark green leaves is supported by aerial roots and often the parent tree dies but the aerial roots which penetrate the soil become massive pillars. The tree gives an impression of immortality for it goes on throwing aerial roots in all directions. These galleries of aerial roots provide most excellent retreats to the sun-weary travellers. Possibly this explains why the tree became one of the sacred trees of Buddhism. We find it sculptured in Buddhist stupas at Bharhut and Sanchi.

After passing through Bhoura we find that the country which is known as Changar provides a great contrast to the verdure of the Palam Valley. On this side, hills are barren, and the cone-like mountain capped by the temple of Asapuri, the temple of the wishgranting goddess, dominates the landscape. We ultimately reached the village of Dramman where we enjoyed the hospitable shade of a banyan tree. There are five magnificent banyan trees in front of the shops under which some travellers were resting. Three women were having their lunch on a platform of stones below a tree, watched by a hungry pariah dog. After resting under the shade of a banyan on a *charpai*, which one of the shopkeepers so hospitably provided, we continued our journey to Maharaj Nagar.

We then passed through Nag Ban, the forest of snakes. Though no snakes could be seen now, during rains there are plenty of them. Yellow racemes of mimosa had considerably enlivened the forest and the dried

trunks of trees were covered with star-like wild jasmines. This was the ancestor of our garden jasmines. Most of our garden plants have their wild ancestor in our jungles, and I was glad to make the acquaintance of this plant in its natural habitat. The presence of a large number of thorny trees and bushes bound together by ropelike coils of the climbing *Bauhineas*, made the forest look intractable.

Maharaj Nagar consists only of the houses of the Raja and his servants built in a forest clearing. Above the houses the garden of loquats and pears merges insensibly into a forest of bamboos. It was Raja Sir Jai Chand who shifted to this place from the ancestral palace at Lambagraon.

The Raja had earlier received an intimation of my visit, but was not sure how much of his collection he could show me with safety. The activities of some art-loving officials had spread mistrust among the owners of collections of paintings. After cordially receiving me and my companion Parmeshwari Das, the Raja left us to the care of his Private Secretary, Dogra, an intelligent young man. He took me to a room which had been specially prepared. A pillow with the words 'Welcome' on one side, and 'Good Night' on the other, embroidered in green and yellow thread lent a gay note to a room which was otherwise drab.

After I had rested for a while, lunch was served in a silver *thali*. Curried meat flavoured with spices, pilau, mango-chutney and *bhatooras*, a fermented bread peculiar to the Punjab hills, were all delicious. The cooks of the Raja are known for their culinary skill. The containers of meat and vegetables called *doonas*, were made of *dhak* leaves sewn by acacia thorns. Dogra did not join us but looked after us with great care. As soon as a *doona* was empty it was promptly refilled.

While the lunch was in progress Dogra joined me in conversation.

"I hope you had a pleasant journey?" asked Dogra.

"When we started the sky was clear. After we had ridden for three hours it became unbearably hot. We sizzled in the sun for about an hour, when clouds appeared in the sky, and shaded us for the rest of the journey."

"When good men travel, God keeps his protecting hand over them," observed Dogra.

Dogra's polished conversation in high-flown Urdu reminded me of Faqeer Azizuddin, the Chief Minister of Maharaja Ranjit Singh. Von Hugel, the Austrian traveller, mentions that on this visit to Lahore he was riding an elephant close to the Faqeer when it began to rain. "This will be a rainy day," observed Hugel. "When princes meet in the garden of friendship," said the Faqeer, "the water-bearers of heaven moisten the flowers, that they may give out all their perfume."

Changing the topic I asked, "Why has the Raja chosen such a lonely site for his residence?"

"You must have heard about his father Raja Sir Jai Chand, who was well known in the Punjab hills. He married nine wives and had 18 children,

but none survived. He was advised by a *sadhu* to build a house in the Nag Ban at the foot of Asapuri Temple. Asapuri grants the wishes of hill people. You must have heard about the miracles of the goddess."

"Were the wishes of Sir Jai Chand fulfilled?" I asked.

"Yes Sir. In this place three sons were born out of whom two are alive, the elder being Raja Dhruv Dev Chand whom you met."

"Now tell me, Sir," he asked, "what is the purpose of your visit?"

"I am trying to trace the history of Kangra painting and want to see the old paintings in the collection of the Raja. He is a descendant of Fateh Chand, the younger brother of Maharaja Sansar Chand, so he must have a part of the collection of Sansar Chand. Please tell the Raja that I want only to photograph some of the paintings for a book on Kangra Paintings, which I am writing for the Government of India, and there is no desire to borrow any of them."

I could see that the Private Secretary felt very much relieved and his face brightened up. He immediately carried the message to the Raja. Soon after that the Raja sent two framed paintings. In one of them a lovely lady was standing under a tree on a bed of flowers waiting for her lover on a dark cloudy night. The sight of this painting thrilled me and I forgot the fatigue of the journey. Then more paintings came, tied in red *bastas*, and preserved from insects by dried leaves of neem, an effective insect-repellant. They included a series of anecdotes from the *Bhagavata Purana* in Basohli style. Possibly, it was received from Jasrota where Aniruddha Chand, son of Sansar Chand, was married. The collection of paintings which Raja Dhruv Dev Chand possesses came as a surprise to me. There are a number of most beautiful paintings of Krishna, Radha and Rama which seem to have been painted by the court artists of Sansar Chand. There is also a set of paintings showing the ten Sikh Gurus, Kabir, Raja Bhartrihari, and the well-known lovers, Baz Bahadur and Rani Rup Mati. Apart from these, the Raja possesses a large number of portraits of Sansar Chand as well as of other *pahari* Rajas. Most probably these are the paintings to which Moorcroft has referred in his book, *Travels in Punjab Himalaya*. Last of all came large cloth-hangings on which battle-scenes, parades of soldiers and marriage processions were painted in bright yellow and blue colours.

The care with which the Raja had preserved the collection of paintings reminded me of the Samurai of Japan who venerated the masterpieces of their national art. Okakura mentions how a Samurai gave his life to rescue Sesson's portrait of the saint Bodhidharma from a burning palace. We have already stated how Ram Singh Pathania wept when he learnt about the destruction of the collection of his paintings by the British soldiers who set fire to his palace. Apart from saving them from art dealers and officials, the manner in which the paintings were stored preserved their bright colours. These paintings were not framed under glass and hung on walls, but packed in pieces of cloth were preserved in large wooden boxes, from

which they were taken out on special occasions for the enjoyment of the Raja and his wives. Apart from the use of mineral colours, this is another reason which explains their bright colours.

We learnt from the Raja that about three miles from his country-house is a cave in the mountains said to be about half a mile long, and when the valley was ravaged by the Gurkhas, the hillmen used to take shelter in it. The Raja also took us to Jaisinghpur from where we had a view of Bijapur, the birth place of Maharaja Sansar Chand. There is a temple of Janki Nath at Bijapur in front of which is a deep well. There is also a level piece of land where the Rajas used to exercise their horses. It is said that a horse, which Kirat Chand was riding, suddenly went out of control and jumped over the well. Considering the width of the well it is indeed a marvel how the rider and the horse escaped a most terrible death.

After spending a full day at Maharaj Nagar I found that it was not possible to return to Andretta the same evening. Realising our difficulty the Raja accommodated us in the guest house. I was thinking over the day's happenings; the thrill of discovering this marvellous collection of paintings, the suspicion of the Raja and how it melted away so pleasantly and above all the polite conversation of the Private Secretary. At this moment Parmeshwari came up.

"Dogra is a very polished Secretary. He is well acquainted with Persian and Urdu," he remarked.

"Persian and Urdu excel all the other languages of India, in politeness and high-flown phrases. You know Urdu is the invention of the Mughals, and no language can beat it in ornate flattery. It was born of the marriage of the spoken language of the people of North India with Persian, which was the court language. You want to taste the flavour of courtly Persian. Now listen to an extract from the *Akbarnama*. This is how Abul Fazl, the biographer of Akbar, records the birth of twins in the royal household: 'One of the occurrences, which occurred during this happy time was the birth of twins. Two priceless jewels appeared from one matrix, two world-lighting stars emerged by one ascension, two glorious eyes received brightness, two earrings were exalted, two precious necklaces shone, two powerful arms came into being, two wrists of success appeared, two beauteous eyebrows came into being, two ears of joy were opened. That is, twin-princes were born. The worlds expanded with joy, and the parterres of flowers smiled. The carpet of joy was spread from shore to shore and happiness was proclaimed to mankind. The sound of the drum of rejoicing was heard throughout the nine heavens, and the strains of the organ of felicity resounded over the six sides of the world.' "\*"

"All this cannot be expressed half so eloquently in Punjabi," remarked Parmeshwari.

\*Abul Fazl, *The Akbarnama*, translated by H. Beveridge, Vol. II, Calcutta, 1904-1910, p. 356.

"Punjabi is a language of the farmers who are practical and have no time to waste on niceties and far-fetched fancies. That is why in this modern age of hurry it is so effectively replacing Urdu in northern India. Moreover this is not the age of leisure when people can afford to waste time on empty formalities and long-winded phrases," I replied.

It was 9 a.m. when we got up next day and prepared for our return journey. The Raja was still at his prayers which we were told were likely to last for two hours more. We could not afford to wait that long and asked the Private Secretary to convey our thanks to him for his hospitality. We had no doubt that he would fulfil this assignment with his customary finesse.

After shaking hands with the Private Secretary, we started on our journey back to Andretta. It was a satisfying experience; we had not only discovered an important collection of paintings but also the 18th century civilization of leisure securely preserved in a corner of the Punjab Himalaya, safe from the onslaught of modern civilization and its meaningless hurry and bustle.

## The Temple of the Lórd of Physicians

**I**T WAS A CALM morning. The sky was blue, and the snowcovered mountain range in the north was silent like a Himalayan sage in deep meditation. A herd of diminutive black cows was grazing along the side of a stream. The wisterias in Woodlands dangled their blue sprays of blossoms from the trellis. Far away from their native Japan, they seemed to be perfectly happy in their new home in the Kangra Valley. It was with reluctance that we left Andretta to pay a visit to Baijnath.

Passing through the bazaar, which consists of a few shops we leave Andretta and walk past an oak forest. After crossing the murmuring stream, on which is a temple of Shiva, we pass through Trehal. Water wheels for pounding paddy are a conspicuous feature of this village. Groves of *tun* trees with leaves shining like burnished copper, gracccful bamboos, and plantains, lend a peculiar charm to these villages. One of the charms of the Kangra valley lies in the fact that like its art, its trees and shrubs present a synthesis of opposites. The vegetation of the tropical monsoon forest is intermingled with that of the temperate zone; the bamboo, the peepal and the mango rub shoulders with the oak, the cherry, and the wild rose. On the banks of the *khads* of Awa and Pun are giant silk cotton trees covered with scarlet blossoms. The buttresses of these trees are surrounded by huge boulders, some of which are smeared with vermilion, and are worshipped as gods. After crossing the *khad* we emerge at Paprola, a roadside village with a prosperous bazaar, which is now electrified.

From Paprola to Baijnath the road ascends gradually till we reach Binnu Khad, called Binduka by the ancient Aryans. From Binnu to Baijnath there is a stiff climb. That we are entering an ancient town is evident from the hoary temples near the entrance of the bazaar. To the left is the rest house of Baijnath, built on a shelf overlooking the Binnu, where there is always a pleasant breeze. At the site of the bungalow was at one time the castle of the Rana, the feudal ruler of the place, who owed allegiance to

the king of Trigarta. About a century ago, remnants of walls and tanks could be seen on the spot. Small copper coins are discovered from time to time at this place. The water of Baijnath is famous for its digestive properties and it is said that even Maharaja Sansar Chand used to get water from here.

In the open ground adjoining the town we saw a strange sight. A batch of young girls weeping and wailing were proceeding towards the river, while a number of boys were standing on the high bank enjoying the sight. The girls threw a couple of images in the river and pretending to be grief-stricken, uttered a loud wail. The boys who were watching this mock funeral laughed loudly. We tried to find the origin of this strange fair which is celebrated at Baijnath and all over the Kangra Valley and learnt that it is born of the universal desire among young girls to get good husbands. The young unmarried girls of Kangra give expression to this desire in the form of a beautiful festival known as 'Worship of Rali.' On the last day of March the maidens bury a cowry in a house and from the following day begin to worship the spot. They assemble morning and evening at the spot for 15 days and continue the worship. In the spring, on the first of Baisakh about the middle of April, Rali is married to Shankar. Half the girls go to the side of Shankar, representing the bridegroom's party, and half go the side of Rali.

The images of Shankar and Rali are rubbed with a mixture of flour, turmeric and mustard oil, and are, in fact, treated as a real bridegroom and bride. Then a Brahmin performs a *havan*, and the girls pour mustard oil over the heads of Shankar and Rali. Shankar is draped in scarlet red clothes, like a bridegroom, and along with Rali is taken in a palanquin in a marriage procession to the river bank. The images are taken out of the palanquin there, and thrown into the river.

This strange but beautiful custom has a historical background. It is said that a Brahmin once gave his full grown daughter, named Rali, in marriage to a child, Shankar by name. When the marriage ceremony was over and the bride was sent to her husband's house along with her child husband and her brother Bastu, she stopped the palanquin bearers on the road by a river. Thus she said to Bastu: "It has been my fate to be married to a child, and I live no more. But in future, in memory of my wretched fate, let girls make three images, one of me, one of my husband, and one of you, my brother Bastu. Let them worship these images for the whole month of Chaitra (March-April) every year until they be married. Then let them marry these images, as I was married, on the first of Baisakh. On the second or third day thereafter let them take the images in a palanquin to the bank of a river, and there let them drown them. And let this be done in honour of me and my brother. The blessing that shall spring forth from this rite shall be that she who performs it shall never marry an unsuitable husband." Saying this she sprang into the river, and was drowned. And in their grief, her husband and brother also drowned themselves. Ever since the worship



of Rali, Shankar and Bastu has been universal throughout the District of Kangra.

After watching the Rali fair, we paid a visit to Shiva temple of Baijnath, a remarkable monument of the Beas valley. The background of snow-covered Dhauladhar lends it a unique majesty and beauty. Baijnath is in reality the appellation of the chief temple dedicated to Shiva Vaidyanatha (Lord of Physicians) by which the village itself has become known. The original name of the village was Kiragrama. This we learn from the two extensive Sarada inscriptions, incised on stone slabs, which in elegant and florid Sanskrit give the history of the foundation of the temple by two local merchants in A.D. 804. "There is in Trigarata," we read in the inscription, "the pleasant village of Kiragrama, the home of numerous virtues where the river called Binduka, leaping from the lap of the mountain, with glittering wide waves resembling playing-balls, merrily plays, like a bright maiden in the first bloom of youth. That village is protected by the strong-armed Rajanaka Lakshmana." Praising Lakshmana for his virtuous conduct, the inscription mentions that after a pilgrimage he took the vow: "Henceforth the wives of others shall be sisters to me." The inscription further says, "What wonder is it that in battle he is safe from the fiercest attacks, since even the god of love has failed to conquer him. There are some who think that the chief attraction in ruling a town is the opportunity to rape the wives of the townspeople. But such are held in low esteem by soldiers. Our prince has youth, beauty, freedom, the rule of our town, and many flatterers. If still his heart eschews the wives of others, what austerity is difficult to him?"

Most of the autocratic rulers of the past sowed plenty of wild oats in their youth. Even Akbar, the great Mughal, had a similar experience. "At Delhi he chanced to see and to fall in love with an extremely beautiful woman, the wife of one Shaikh Abdul-Wasi, and sent a message to the Shaikh reminding him of the article in the code of Chengiz Khan to the effect that the husband of any woman whom the sovereign may desire, is bound to divorce his wife and surrender her to his lord. The complaisant Shaikh, divorced his wife and retired to Bidar in Deccan. The woman through whom Akbar had become acquainted with the Shaikh's wife now suggested that he should connect himself with the leading families of Delhi and Agra, and pandars and eunuchs were employed to inspect secretly the harems of the leading men of the city and report the discovery of any women of special beauty."\* He learnt wisdom only after an aggrieved slave shot an arrow at him wounding him slightly. The slave was executed, but after that Akbar abandoned his search for feminine beauty and no longer molested the wives and daughters of his subjects.

\* Sir Richard Burn (Ed.), *The Cambridge History of India*, Vol. IV, S. Chand & Co., Delhi, 1957, pp. 86, 87.

The inscription further records that in Rana Lakshmana's barony there lived "a well-known merchant named Manyuka, the son of Siddha, whose younger brother, undivided from him in property and solely intent upon pious works, is called Ahuka and whose blameless wife is called Gulha. By him, a bee in the park of devotion, and by his brother, has been erected this temple of Shiva, at the door of which stand the statues of Ganga, Yamuna, and other deities, together with a *mandapa*. The high-minded son of Asika, named Navaka, who is the head of the masons, came from Susarman's town to this village; and likewise Thodhuka, the son of Sammana. By these two together has the very lofty temple of Shiva been fashioned with the chisel as well as the *mandapa*; it has been constructed in accordance with the opinion of Samu, and on it glitter the figures of the crowd of the Ganas." It is interesting to find, that the architects employed by the two merchants came from Kangra town.

The Baijnath temple is orientated due west. It consists of an adytum, surmounted by a spire of the usual conical shape, and of a *mandapa* or front hall, covered with a low pyramid roof. The adytum, which contains the 'linga' known as Vaidyanatha, is entered through a small ante-room. The roof of the *mandapa* is supported by four massive pillars, connected by raised benches which form, as it were, a passage leading up to the entrance of the sanctum. The architraves resting on these pillars divide the space of the ceiling into nine compartments, each of which is closed by means of corbelling slabs.

In front of the *mandapa* rises a stately porch resting on four columns. "The shafts of these pillars," Fergusson remarks, "are plain cylinders, of very classical proportions, and the bases also show that they are only slightly removed from classical design. The square plinth, the two toruses, the cavetto or hollow moulding between are all classical, but partially hidden by Hindu ornamentation of great elegance but unlike anything found afterwards." The capitals of the pot and foliage type are discussed by the same author at considerable length. Both the south and north walls of the *mandapa* are adorned with graceful balcony windows. The four corners are strengthened by means of massive buttress-like projections, each containing two niches in which image slabs are placed.

The outer walls of the sanctum are enriched with three pillared niches enclosed in projecting chapels, each flanked by two niches of smaller size. The central niche in the east wall contains an image of the sun-god Surya wearing a laced jacket. It is placed on a marble pedestal, which originally must have belonged to a figure of the Jina Mahavira, as appears from a Nagari inscription dated in the Vikrama year 1296 (A.D. 1240). The roof of the temple seems to be modern. According to the statements of the local priests it was renovated in the days of Raja Sansar Chand which obliterated many of its features. It is fortunate that the temple of Baijnath, although situated at no great distance from the centre of the earthquake of April

4, 1905, suffered but slight injury from that catastrophe. The neighbouring smaller temple of Siddhanath, on the contrary, collapsed completely.

At the foot of the Dhauladhar, above Baijnath, is the picturesque village of Beer. This is the seat of Pal Rajputs, who ruled this area in the past. On the outskirts of the village is a beautiful oak forest on a sloping ground. In the forest there is a bubbling stream of water. As we ascend, we reach the house of Prithi Pal, a scion of the ruling family, and now a zaildar and a tea-grower. During the Holi festival, a fair is held in the oak forest, attended by Gaddis and Kanets from the Dhauladhar who, inspired by generous doses of rice-beer, dance and sing the whole day through. Like the Kulu men, they also bring their gods in gaily decorated palanquins, and the oak forest of Beer presents the appearance of the Kulu Dussehra in miniature.

**mandi  
and  
suket**



## Music of the Mule Bells

**T**HE MORNING STAR WAS shining with unusual brilliance. Around it was a halo, the like of which I had never seen before. Tung! tung! tung! came the sound of the mule bells in the silence of the morning. The caravans of mules were already on the road. The melancholy sound of the mule bells was a reminder that we should also get ready for our journey to Mandi. The hour of sunrise is a sacred hour in the mountains and should never be missed. While the luggage was being packed, I went towards the gorge of the Binnu river at the back of the travellers' rest house at Baijnath to watch the sunrise from behind the mountains. There was a coppery glow behind the mountains. As the sun rose, the white snow-covered mountains became steel-grey, and for a while they lost their splendour.

We were on the road again. The scenery from Baijnath to Joginder Nagar is of incomparable loveliness. On skirting the climb above Baijnath we had a bird's eye view of the Palam Valley. Waving rice fields, are dotted with homesteads surrounded by clumps of *tun* and bamboo. They are flanked by the Dhauladhar to the north, the low Andretta range to the south, and numerous hill ranges to the south-west. The temple of Asapuri on a conical hill behind the Andretta range stands out conspicuously, holding out hope and promise to the hillmen in distress. After passing through a pine forest we saw a beautiful valley with low conical hills on both sides. Here no gorges are to be seen, and the hills slope gently to the level of the road. To the south is a charming oak forest, and to the north are peaceful villages surrounded by low terraces of paddy fields. The wires of the Uhl river power system, passing over the villages, spoil the view of the Dhauladhar. These are the tentacles of civilization which in due course will smother the charm of the valley. The walls of the roadside shops are covered with white rambling roses which shine like stars in the moonlight.

From Joginder Nagar onwards the road is tortuous. It winds like the trail of a snake, and is hemmed in by gloomy mountains. After two hours of tiresome motoring we reached the salt mines of Drang which supply salt

to the mountaineers of the Punjab Himalayas. The Beas was now in sight, and it was a reminder that we were not far from Mandi. Soon the slate-roofed houses of Mandi were visible. We entered the town by a suspension bridge built in 1877 by Raja Bijai Sen. At each end of the bridge are towers. The bridge was rocking gently under the wheels of the car.

The Raja was in Delhi, but he was kind enough to direct his manager at Mandi to accept us as his guests in his palace. We were accommodated in the guest rooms at the back of the palace. These rooms were shut in from all sides and we could not have a view of the mountains. The rooms in the palace, and the walls around the staircase were covered with portraits of the Rajas, in oil colours. Some of these were copied from the miniatures. There are a number of portraits of rulers before Sidh Sen, when the art of painting was not known in the hills. All these portraits are imaginary. In all of them the facial formula adopted by the artist is the same, and he only made variations in the length of beards and moustaches. We were informed that the collection of miniature paintings was with the Rani who was now in Bombay. This was disappointing as it deprived us of the pleasure and excitement of study of the paintings from Mandi at the spot. When the paintings from the Rajas' collections are dispersed, it becomes difficult to settle the problems of style, provenance, and dates.

Mandi means a market, and the town derives its name from the fact that it was once a centre of trade on the main road from Ladakh and Yarkand to the Punjab plains. Even now the produce of Lahaul, Spiti and Kulu Valleys passes through Mandi. The present town was founded by Raja Ajbar Sen in 1527. He also built the old palace called *chowki*, as well as the Shiva temple of Bhutnath. The palace called Damdama was built by Suraj Sen (1637-64).

A bird's eye view of Mandi can be had from the temple of Shyama Kali situated 500 feet above the town, at an altitude of 3000 ft. above sea level. The town centres around the old palace in front of which is a sunken park. In olden days it was a tank, which has been drained, and planted. In a corner is a Shiva temple with statues of two wrestlers in front of it.

An important land-mark in Mandi are the royal *sati* stones, known as *barselas*, on the left bank of the Suketi river. These grim monuments of female devotion are vertical slabs carved by the hill masons. On the top of each is carved the figure of the Raja, and below him are his Ranis, concubines, and slave girls who were burnt alive with the royal corpse. With one Raja as many as 25 women were burnt. The name of the Raja, as well as the year of his rule are given on the *barselas*, and as such, these are important records of the history of Mandi.

In the annals of Mandi, the massive personality of Raja Sidh Sen (1684-1727) stands out prominently. He extended the territories of Mandi by his conquests of villages belonging to the neighbouring States of Suket and Banghal. His clothes preserved in the Mandi palace indicate that he was almost a giant.

Sidh Sen had two wives of equal rank. Both the queens gave birth to sons at the same time. When the twins grew up a dispute arose as to who was to be the heir-apparent. Personality tests are not merely a modern innovation. Sidh Sen was familiar with them. He ordered that a sword and a heap of dust be placed where the two children were playing. One of them began playing with the heap of dust, while the other caught hold of the sword. The one that caught hold of the sword was given the name of Shamsheer Sen and declared as the heir, and the other had to remain content with the title of *dhur chatya* or dust-cater.

His subjects believed that Sidh Sen was a magician and could work miracles. He had a book of charms by means of which people thought he could exercise his influence on spirits. Sidh Sen's reputation for miracles has survived him. Whenever there is a case of a prolonged child-birth in Mandi, his sword is borrowed from the Raja by the husband of the woman and dipped in water which is then given to her to drink. The hill people believe that the evil spirit obstructing the child-birth is thus scared away.

It seems that the art of painting in Basohli style was introduced in Mandi towards the latter part of the reign of Sidh Sen. French, in his *Himalayan Art* has reproduced two paintings of Sidh Sen in the primitive Basohli style. In one of these he is shown surrounded by his Ranis and female servants. Painting in the Basohli style must have continued during the reign of Shamsheer Sen (1727-81) and his successor Surma Sen (1781-88).

Sansar Chand invaded Mandi in 1792, plundered the capital and carried away the young Raja Ishwari Sen to Tira Sujanpore where he was detained as a prisoner for twelve years. On the downfall of Sansar Chand when he was besieged by the Gurkhas, Ishwari Sen was released. It seems that the Kangra artists, among whom was Sajnu, came to Mandi after 1810. The Mandi collection includes a series of paintings illustrating the *Hamir Hath*, the epic of Hamir of Ranthambor who fought with Alauddin Khilji, the king of Delhi. These paintings are ascribed to Sajnu. There was also a portrait of Moorcroft, the English traveller who visited Mandi in 1820, in the Raja's collection. Giving his impressions of Ishwari Sen, Moorcroft writes: "The Raja of Mandi, Ishwari Sen, is a short stout man, about thirty five, of limited understanding and extreme timidity. The latter he inherits from his father, of whom it is asserted that he passed an order that no gun should be fired in his country. In his infancy he was either a ward or a prisoner of Sansar Chand and he was indebted to the Gurkhas for the restoration of his *raj*. He assisted them in their invasion of Kangra, and also aided Ranjit Singh in his operations against Kangra and Kulu. This has not preserved him from the fate of the other hill Rajas. He is tributary to the Sikh and treated by him with contumely and oppression."\*

\* Moorcroft, W. and Trebeck, G. (ed. Wilson H.H.), *Travels in the Himalayan Province of Hindoostan and the Punjab*, London, 1837.



Ishwari Sen was succeeded by Zalim Sen (1826-39), who, true to his name, was cruel and capricious. He earned notoriety for his novel methods of extorting money from his subjects. Like his predecessor, he was a tributary of the Sikh court of Lahore.

Balbir Sen (1839-51) succeeded Zalim Sen. Vigne, the English traveller, who passed through Mandi in 1839, giving his impressions of Balbir Sen writes: "The young Raja himself is short and stout in person, with a jovial, good-natured and remarkably European-like countenance. He was uncommonly civil and prodigal of his expressions of regard and friendship of the English, and unlike many other Rajas, he allowed me to depart when I wished, without pressing me to stay a day longer than suited my convenience."\* This was the period when Sikh power was on the wane, and the hill Rajas were looking forward to welcoming the new rulers of India.

Vigne has also left an interesting account of the murals in the Mandi palace, one of which shows Shiva and Parvati in Kailash. He thus describes this mural: "I partook of the Raja's hospitality in a part of the palace which had lately been fitted up and painted in the Indian fashion, in fresco, on a snow-white wall. I derived some amusement from an inspection of the new paintings on the walls, and of these, one in particular attracted my attention, as it was a specimen of the not unusual attempts of a Hindu Raphael to embody his ideas of heaven. In the centre of the celestial city, of mixed Hindu and Saracenic architecture, was a courtyard, surrounded by a plain octagonal wall; its circumference, such was the perspective, could not have exceeded one hundred yards. Within the court was a building, or vestibule, in which Parvati, sat (having nothing better to do in heaven) smoking a hooka, by way of whiling away eternity; and around her were four female attendants, whose chief occupation seemed to be that of fanning their mistress. In front of the vestibule was Shiva, her husband, the four-armed, performing a *pas seul*. Three of his arms were brandished with the grace of a castanet player, and in the fourth hand he bore aloft a miniature image of his bull Nandi. On either side, as spectators, were arranged all the gods and goddesses of the Hindu Pantheon, and evidently disposed to venerate and applaud the performance of their divine master. On the outside were ranged the buildings of the city, and around them again arose the peaks of Kailash amongst which, and near the narrow gateway of the courtyard, were several fakirs and ascetics, who were patiently waiting until death enabled them to enter it."\* When people accustomed to certain concepts of heaven or hell are confronted by a different culture, they react in this manner combining ridicule with ignorance. We ourselves react in a similar manner to the angels, who are represented as human beings with avian appendages in Christian painting.

\*G.T. Vigne, *Travels in Kashmir, Ladak and Iskardo*, Vols. I and II, London, 1842, pp. 79, 81 and 82.

The old palace is now a district court, and the rooms with mural paintings are being used as record rooms. This is not a solitary instance of vandalism. At Gwalior in 1961 I saw beautifully painted rooms of the old palace being used as offices. Callousness, and lack of imagination on the part of the State authorities in free India who are supposed to be the guardians of art and culture is truly shocking.

A temple of great scenic beauty, Prashar is about 20 miles north-east of Mandi. It is reached by nine miles of steep footpath from Hatula. After a strenuous climb we reached our destination. At 9,000 feet is a cup-like valley with a lake in which there is a floating island. The blue water of the lake and its green surroundings with the backdrop of snow-covered mountain range provide a sight of sublime beauty. The pagoda-like three storeyed temple and its surroundings make a great impression on the beholder. No other temple in the western Himalayas can rival the grandeur of the setting of Prashar Rikhi.

## A Lake with Floating Islands

**I**N MANDI TOWN ARE settled a number of white-clad Namdhari Sikhs who carry on the trades of cloth-selling and carpentry. Their presence in this town, so far away from their homes in the Punjab plains, aroused my curiosity. I learnt that they have a belief that Riwalsar lake, which is about twelve miles from Mandi, would be the only safe place in the world when it is overtaken by a calamity of unprecedented magnitude. They have been expecting such a holocaust for the last sixty years and have been fixing various dates which have been conveniently postponed from time to time. It is with this anticipation of the end of the world that they have settled in Mandi in such numbers. I had often heard of Riwalsar from the Namdharis and my curiosity was awakened. Now that I was in Mandi itself, I felt that it would be worthwhile paying a visit to the Riwalsar lake which is accessible by jeep by a tortuous hill road.

Riwalsar is a cup-like lake, surrounded by hills at an altitude of 4,000 feet above sea level. On the surface of the lake are seven floating islands. It is said that the spirit of Padma Sambhava, the Buddhist saint, resides in these islands which are regarded as holy, and are worshipped by the pilgrims. They are decorated with large number of prayer flags which flutter in the air. These islands are composed of aquatic plants which intertwine in a mat-like fashion forming rafts, and are similar to the floating fields of the Kashmiris in the Dal lake of Srinagar. Where the road ends is the glittering temple of Padma Sambhava (A.D. 750-800) painted in bright red, yellow and gold, Padma Sambhava was invited by the Tibetan king Srongldebtzan to preach the doctrine of Buddhism in Tibet. Mandi, then known to the Tibetans as Zahor, was also the home of Padma Sambhava. When in A.D. 900 the Buddhists were persecuted by the Tibetan king Lang-Darma, some of them came back to Zahor and brought with them a large number of their religious books.

After seeing the Buddhist temple we decided to make a circuit of the lake. On our way came a Hindu temple associated with Rishi Lomas. As there

was no image of any artistic merit in it we decided to push along. The sight of the floating islands decked with multi-coloured prayer flags gently waving in the breeze was more impressive than the Hindu temple. A flight of ducks landed on the lake. They were completely fearless, as if they knew that it was a sanctuary where no one would harm them. They were merrily flapping their wings and skimming over the surface of the lake. We sat for a while on the shore of the lake, watching the sight.

My friend and companion on this journey was an inveterate smoker of cigars. Lectures on the harmful effects of tobacco smoke on the lungs and the possibility of his getting cancer made no impression on him and he continued to pollute the atmosphere of the lake. We decided to walk to the Sikh temple. Riwalsar is remarkable in that the temples of three faiths—Buddhist, Hindu, and Sikh—co-exist here. It is a tribute to the broad-mindedness of the Rajas of Mandi. The Sikh temple simple, austere and clean, was perched on the side of a hill and was accessible by a long flight of stairs. It was built in the memory of Guru Gobind Singh, the 10th Guru of the Sikhs, who spent some time here as a guest of Raja Sidh Sen who received him with great courtesy. The Guru, apart from being a warrior, was a poet and a mystic and most of the shrines associated with him are built at sites of great natural beauty.

"We are now going to see the Sikh shrine," I told my friend, "you better extinguish the cigar and put it here."

"What is the harm if I continue to smoke?" he said, having puffs at the cigar.

"There can be great harm to you. You see that fierce-looking Sikh with a blue turban covered with quoits, wearing a long sword," said I pointing towards the Sikh priest sitting on the platform below the temple. "He might repeat the experience of Schofft on your person."

"Who was Schofft?"

"Agoston Schofft was a renowned Hungarian painter. His grandfather Joseph who was also a painter was born in Germany and migrated to Pest in Hungary where he purchased a house. The street in which this house was situated is still called Kepiro Utea, viz. the Street of Painters after the profession of Joseph. It was here that Agoston was born in 1809. In 1828, he studied art in Vienna, followed by seven years travel in Italy, France and Switzerland. In 1835 he returned to Pest and lived in a hotel where he painted and sold his portraits and landscapes and also fell in love with the daughter of a penniless officer, whom he married against the wishes of his father. This event set him off on his travels again and he visited Odessa and Constantinople."

"How did he come to Punjab?"

"The lure of the romantic East attracted many European travellers to India in the nineteenth century and Schofft was one of them. Accompanied by his wife he passed through Arabia, Persia and Afghanistan sketching

picturesque characters. On November 14, 1841, he reached Lahore and was accepted as a guest by Dr Honigberger, a Transylvanian, who was the personal physician of Maharaja Sher Singh. Schofft painted portraits of Sher Singh and his principal courtiers. His painting of the durbar of Lahore, was purchased on his return to Europe by Louis Phillippe, and is now in Paris. He also sketched a portrait of Bhai Gurmukh Singh, the principal Sikh priest of the Golden Temple at Amritsar. Sher Singh happened to visit Amritsar, and Honigberger and Schofft were also in his retinue. The people of Amritsar invited the prince to the sacred temple at night when it was gorgeously illuminated. All the Sardars of the Punjab were collected there in the splendour of oriental pageantry, and it was a memorable scene."

"What happened to Schofft?"

"Now listen to the account given by Honigberger about the fate of Schofft. 'Sher Singh honoured me with his commands that we should accompany him, sending us a richly caparisoned elephant for our accommodation. Sher Singh enquired of my friend, Herr Schofft, if he could take for him a drawing of that brilliant scene. He answered in the affirmative, but proposed to the Maharaja that it would be better if the scene was sketched under the effect of daylight instead of the imperfect one of the illumination. On the following morning we went to the house of Bhai Gurmukh Singh, who had promised, on the previous evening, to send a servant to point out to us the most elevated terrace in the square which was in the mansion of Ranjit Singh and from which Herr Schofft could get a view of the temple and the surrounding buildings; on this place he prepared his atelier. He occupied the whole of the day in sketching the scene, and on the following day also he went there, but alone, to continue his work. About noon, having that morning received some newspapers from my native place, Kronstadt, I went to him, and he asked me to read to him whilst he was painting. About an hour before sunset, his work was nearly finished, and as the court had already departed for Lahore, whither we wished to proceed immediately, he requested me to go to our quarters and to procure some boxes in which he could enclose his paintings. Our quarters were outside the city, in a garden formerly belonging to the prince Naunihal Singh. When I reached home I immediately forwarded to him a horse and servants, as he had told me he should finish his painting within an hour after I had left him.

" 'Herr Schofft was a great smoker, and attracted attention in Amritsar by his scarcely ever being seen abroad without having a cigar in his mouth. Now smoking is considered by the Nihangs and the Sikhs as sinful, or rather criminal; more especially in or near such a holy place as their chief sanctuary; Herr Schofft was aware of this, and therefore studiously avoided smoking whilst engaged in taking this sketch. It happened, however, that, as is customary with painters he now and then in the course of the work placed one of his pencils in his mouth in order to keep it separate from those in the left hand whilst using another with the right. This was observed by those

who stood watching his operations from beneath the terrace, and they imagined, in consequence, that he was smoking. The rumour first spread about in whispers one to another, and as the impression became confirmed, a general indignation manifested itself; and loud exclamations were soon heard, that the feringhee was committing sacrilege by smoking in their sacred place. The people speedily increased in numbers, and a clamorous mob soon surrounded the palace. The artist was at first unconscious of the cause of the gathering, but he soon became aware of their shouts and threats, that he was in some way the object of their fury, and that he was consequently in dangerous position. He had no sooner, however, made up his mind that his best policy would be to effect his escape, if possible unperceived; when some of the ringleaders of the mob, who had made their way through the palace, rushed upon the terrace, and attempted to seize him. Being a strong and vigorous man, he succeeded in wrenching himself from their grasp, and made his way to the staircase, which to his dismay he found crowded by the mob, who were making their way up. Knowing that his only chance lay in breaking through them as quickly as possible, he struck out right and left, and having the advantage of being uppermost of those who attempted to stay his progress, he succeeded in reaching the bottom with some few bruises. Here, however, the affair presented a still more formidable aspect; for no sooner had he reached the foot of the staircase, than he was seized by the collar and other parts of his coat by half-a-dozen of the mob, and saw at a little distance the glittering of several of their weapons. He gave himself up for lost, and in the energy of despair threw open his coat, and taking advantage of a slight confusion at the moment (caused by a struggle to get possession of the gold watch which he had held in his hand, and had at the same instant relinquished to them), he slipped from the coat, which was held on all sides, and pushing away those in front of him, he succeeded in reaching the street; here his nether garments fell, in some unaccountable manner, about his feet, and he stumbled and fell into a miry puddle which was immediately before him: he instantly sprang to his feet, and rushed to the entrance of a dark stable close adjacent. The mob concluded that they had now secured their prey, but they were mistaken; for Schofft had, fortunately, whilst passing this stable on a previous occasion in my company, entered it, and noticed its back entrance, which led into the bazaar; through this back door he then gained the bazaar, and from thence, the mob all the way at his heels, reached the house of his protector, Bhai Gurmukh Singh. The door was immediately shut, and Schofft was saved.' '\*

After listening to this account my friend was thoroughly convinced about the wisdom of the advice given to him. He realized that what happened in 1835 could also happen in 1960. He extinguished his cigar and placed it in a bush, emptied his pockets of cigarettes and cigars, covered his head with a

\* J.M. Honigberger, *Thirty Five Years in the East*, London, 1852, pp. 172-175.

towel and removed his shoes. Now we boldly climbed the stairs and reached the temple and after presenting a rupee to the Sikh priest we rested on the shaded platform from which we had a good view of the lake.

After he had regained the composure of his mind, my friend asked "Do you know what other places Schofft visited in India after the incident, you narrated?"

"From Amritsar, Schofft proceeded to Delhi, where he painted a portrait of Bahadur Shah, the last Mughal Emperor of India. From Delhi he proceeded to Agra, Banaras, Calcutta and Bombay where he sketched places of scenic interest. From Bombay he boarded a ship and reached Egypt and from there he came to Austria. In 1858 he exhibited his famous painting, *The Court of Lahore*, in Vienna, Paris and London. Like a true artist he squandered his savings and spent the last years of his life in London where he died a pauper at the age of 79."

## Goddess in a Bath Tub

**A**FTER SEEING RIWALSAR we decided to pay a visit to Sundarnagar, the capital of Suket. The road passes through the valley of the Suketi river, a tributary of the Beas. The Suketi valley is exceedingly fertile and supports a prosperous agriculture. There was a bumper crop of wheat in the fields and the scattered trees of wild pears was an added attraction. In olden days it was known as Balh plain, and was the bone of contention between the Rajas of Mandi and Suket. Whoever was powerful held sway over this valley, the bread-basket of Mandi-Suket hills.

Spring in Suketi valley is delightful. Gentians, violets, anemones, and larkspurs cover embankments of the fields. As the warmth of spring increases, clematis and wild rose lend a gay note to the hedges. Spiracas, wild roses and herbaceous annuals almost give an impression that one is in Europe. Mangoes, figs and sissoo in which parrots and mynahs chatter, remind us that we are very much in India. In temperate Europe winter heralds the death of the year, and spring a tedious regeneration. "Here in the Punjab hills," as Hugel observed, "Nature is immortal and her sleep is so light that the first warm day of spring arouses her."

While standing on the roadside admiring the beauty of the valley, I saw a *gaddi* shepherd grazing a flock of sheep on a grassy sward. These shepherds and their flocks of sheep provide a most striking object for photography. The shepherd was sitting on a large stone smoking a *hookah*. A ray of sunlight came through the overhanging rock like a spotlight on the stage and illuminated the place where the shepherd was seated. I got down and decided to take a few snaps. The shepherd and his two sons very obligingly posed for me. After the photographs were taken, the shepherd sat down and striking a piece of flint against a stone lighted a fire. He caught the sparks in the woolly floss of the dry flowers of the edelweiss, and lighted a pile of pine cones in a *chulha* which he had made by collecting stones. On this he placed a copper vessel, and boiled water. He caught a goat and milked it. In a few minutes tea was ready and he offered me a glass-full which I accepted. I thought it was an idyllic life, in which there were no



worries of house-rents, income-tax and renewal of licenses which constantly plague the middle class people who live in cities.

"Yours is a very peaceful life," I said, "with no worries."

"What is our life!" he said. "We live like bears in caves. Sometimes our sheep get lost and we spend hours searching for them. Sometimes the flocks are attacked by leopards. It is your life which is interesting. Today you are here, and tomorrow you will be in a big city."

"Where do you live at night?" I asked. He pointed towards a rock shelter darkened by smoke. "There are numerous such shelters all over the Himalayas in which the shepherds spend their nights. For protection against the cold they cover themselves with blankets, and sometimes with live sheep."

Let us now look into the history of the Rajas of Suket. The Rajas of Suket and Mandi claim descent from the Sena dynasty of Bengal. The earliest known Raja of Suket, was Dhir Sen (A.D. 765) who came to the hills along with other Rajput adventurers, and after conquering the Ranas and Thakurs, the feudal rulers of the place, carved a kingdom for himself.

Mantar Sen, the Raja who ruled in the early 13th century died without leaving an issue. There were two claimants to the *gaddi* from among the collaterals—Liyun Phiyun and Mian Madan. The State officials held a feast which was attended by these two, along with the other royal kinsmen. When food was being served a message was received that a revolt had taken place in a remote part of the State. Liyun Phiyun, who was lazy by temperament, said that the matter could be attended to after the feast was over. On the other hand, Mian Madan sprang to his feet and seizing his arms left the assembly saying that it was no time for feasting when the State was in danger. It was a false alarm but it enabled the officials to judge the character of the contestants. They selected Mian Madan as their Raja for the courage and promptitude which he had shown. This anecdote shows the qualities the hill people expected, in their rulers.

It is very likely that the painting in Basohli style may have been done during the reign of Garur Sen (1721-1748). It was during his reign that Baned, now called Sundarnagar, was founded as the State capital. Paintings in Kangra style must have been done at Sundarnagar during the reign of Bikrama Sen (1791-1838) who was a contemporary of Sansar Chand.

Moorcroft was the first Englishman who passed through Suket. He came to Suket in 1820 and thus records his impressions: "On the arrival of our party at Suket a general panic prevailed, and many of the people prepared to make their escape into the neighbouring thickets. A report had spread that the Feringis or Europeans were approaching with a numerous host to occupy and devastate the country, and the villagers imagined those of my people who had been sent on in advance, to be the precursors of the invading host. When they found, however, that our proceedings were wholly pacific and that we paid for the supplies we required, their terror was allayed, and gradually confidence succeeded to apprehension. They

had never yet beheld a European, and curiosity brought crowd after crowd to look at the *Sahib-log*, until it was dark. Night set in with a thunder storm, and in the darkness we were disturbed by the singular howling of the hyaenas, which approached our campment, and are said to be common here.”\*

Suket was a well-governed state and had a number of capable Ministers who tried to improve the State finances. Out of these the most revenue-conscious was Pandit Narotam. He made a law that widows should be sold and the proceeds credited to the State, and their property assigned to the temple of Narsinghji of which he was the chief priest. Considering the fact that the burning of widows had been stopped, he regarded this as the best solution of the problem.

On reaching Sundarnagar we were received by the Raja and his elder son who is employed in a British Oil Company. Sundarnagar is a neat, little town with rows of white-washed cottages on both sides of a tarred road. Avenues of cypress and eucalyptus lend it an air of distinction.

The Raja lives in three small rooms which he has furnished tastefully. He and his sons have made remarkable adjustments to changed conditions. Instead of moaning about their misfortune or loss of power and prestige they were reconciled to the new situation. The young princes received good education in the Delhi University.

India's silent revolution has demolished the edifice of feudalism, but in the process there has been no chopping of heads as in other countries.

After we had tea we tactfully broached the subject of paintings which was the main object of our visit. As in some other hill States we were told that the State collection of paintings had been taken away by an art-loving official. This was the familiar tale, which we heard in many places in the Punjab Himalayas.

There were only five paintings of an inferior type to be seen. Our journey to Suket was a disappointment in the sense that no significant collection of paintings could be discovered. However, the paintings which we saw provided clues to collections which are now dispersed, and some of these seem to be of Suket origin. The paintings of the *Bhagavata Purana* now in the possession of Rajendra Singhi, a millionaire of Calcutta, greatly resemble some of the paintings which we saw in the collection of the Raja of Suket. It is possible that they were painted by the same artist.

After examining the paintings we decided to explore Sundarnagar and its environs. The young prince took us to a temple of Devi, the tutelary goddess of the family. Adjoining the sanctuary in which the image of the Devi is kept, is a bath-room with a porcelain bath-tub, near which were a towel and soap. The prince told us that the Devi bathes in the bath-tub and in the morning the towel is often found wet. This was indeed a unique

\* W. Moorcroft and G. Trebeck (ed. H.H. Wilson), *Travels in the Himalayan Province of Hindoostan and the Punjab*, London, 1837.

case of a goddess bathing in a modern porcelain bath-tub, and we would never have believed it, had we not seen this temple and the arrangements made, with our own eyes. Even the goddesses are enjoying modern amenities. After admiring the view of the Suketi valley from the temple, we thanked the Raja and the young prince and bade good-bye to Suket.



FIG. 27 A beautiful village in Bilaspur

FIG. 28 A Gaddi shepherd with his two sons





FIG. 29 The temple of Nuncote.

FIG. 30 Kamadev spreads his net of love over entire creation. A mural in the palace of Pura of Baghal in Arka.





Fig. 1. A view of the mountain of Tiv in Bodoni, in Cienega District.

Fig. 2. A view of the mountain of Tiv in Bodoni, in Cienega District.





FIG. 33. A view of Chamba town, hemmed in by high hills. The prominent building in the centre is Raghunath or painted palace.

FIG. 34. The Raja's new palace at Chandra.

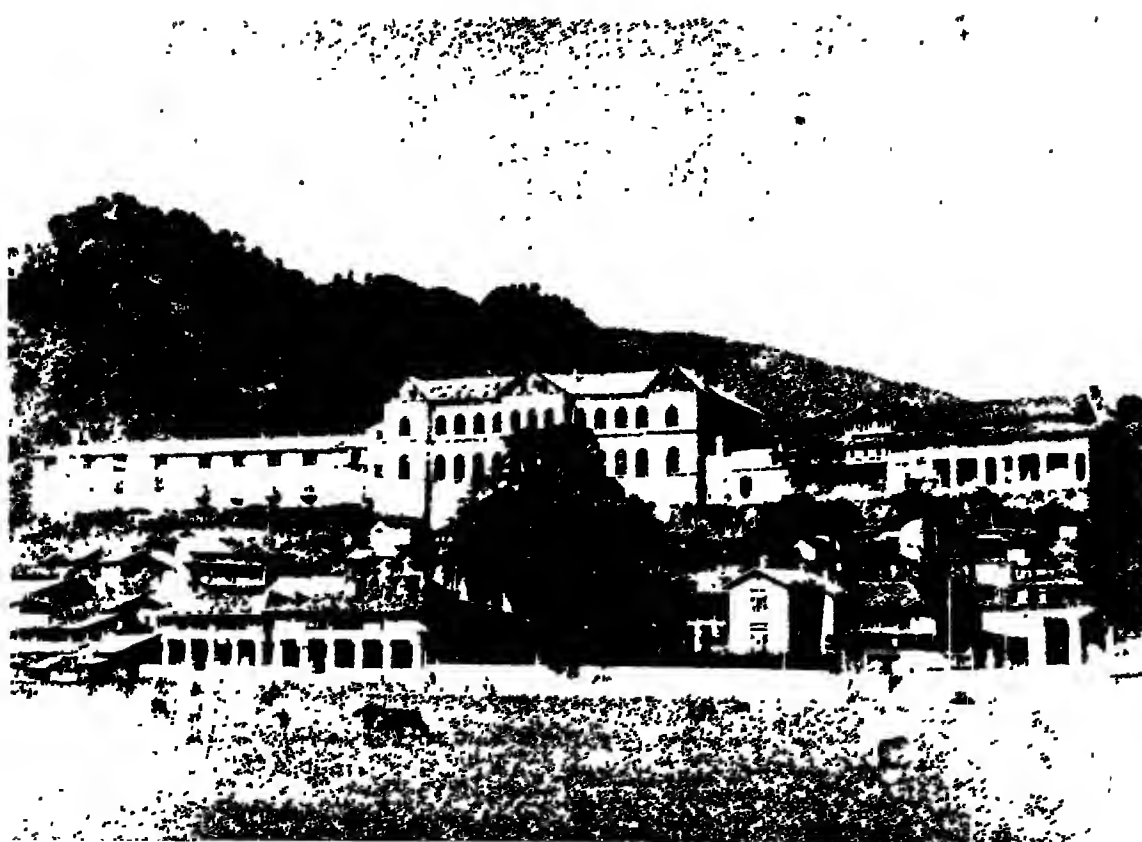




Fig. 35 The Lakshminarayan temple at Chamba





Fig. 36. The palace of the Maharaja of Tehri Garh, at a New Delhi, 1930.

Fig. 37. Workshops of the Deoria.





16 to the S



FIG. 39 Temple at Naldara

FIG. 40 The priest and the Devata



FIG. 41 A rear view of the Devata's palanquin





FIG. 12 The village of Mithunag. The temple in the background.

FIG. 13 The temple of Mithunag.

FIG. 14 The carved door of the temple of Mithunag.



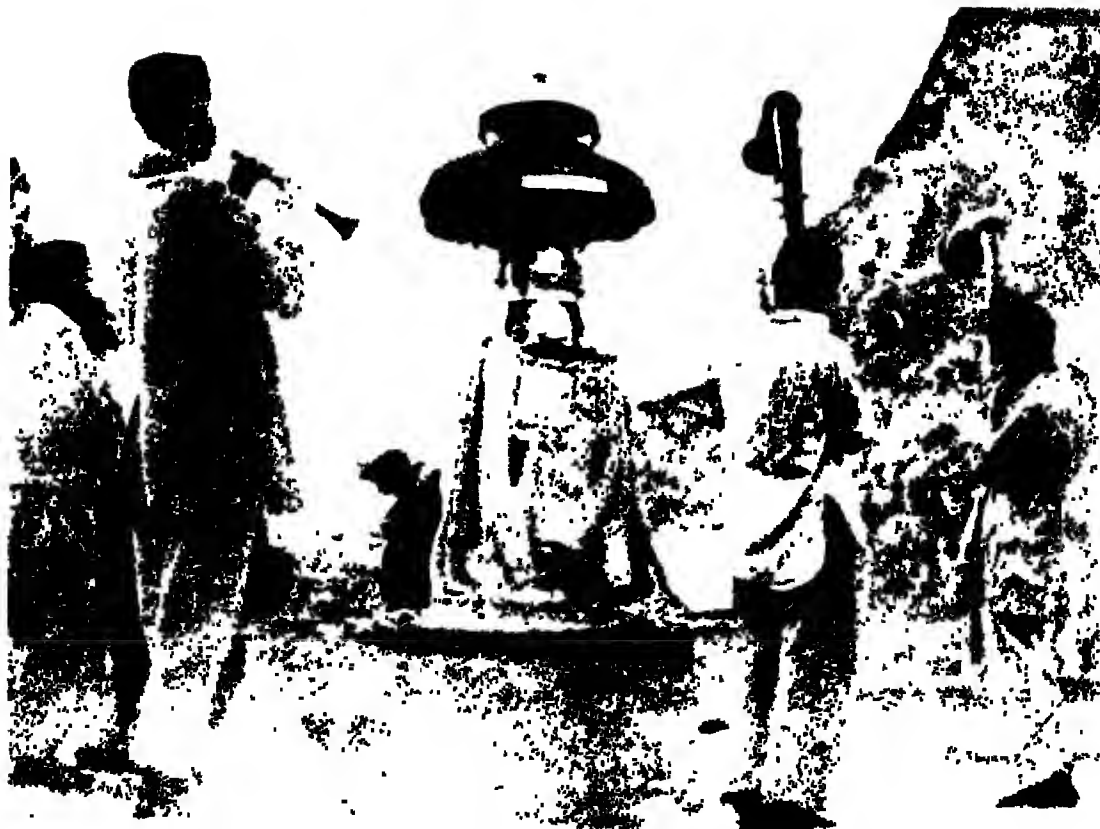


FIG. 15. Worship of the goddess in the courtyard.

FIG. 16. Wood carving of the temple of Mahurra.





FIG. 17. Kinn, on the east of the Kinn, in the

THE KINN, IN THE EAST OF THE KINN, IN THE



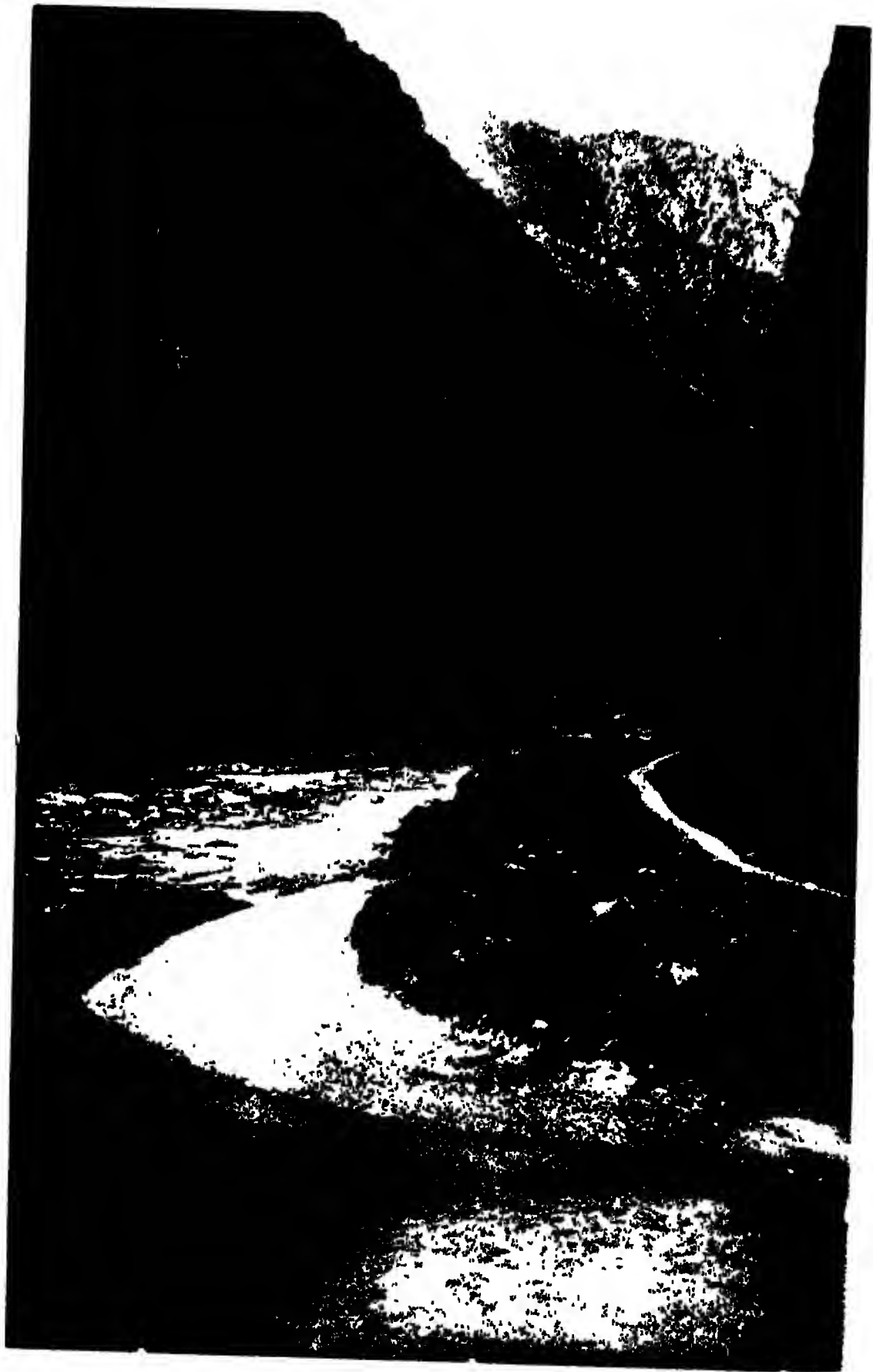


FIG. 19 The Beas at Lari



Fig. 50 The mask of Devi Kothi

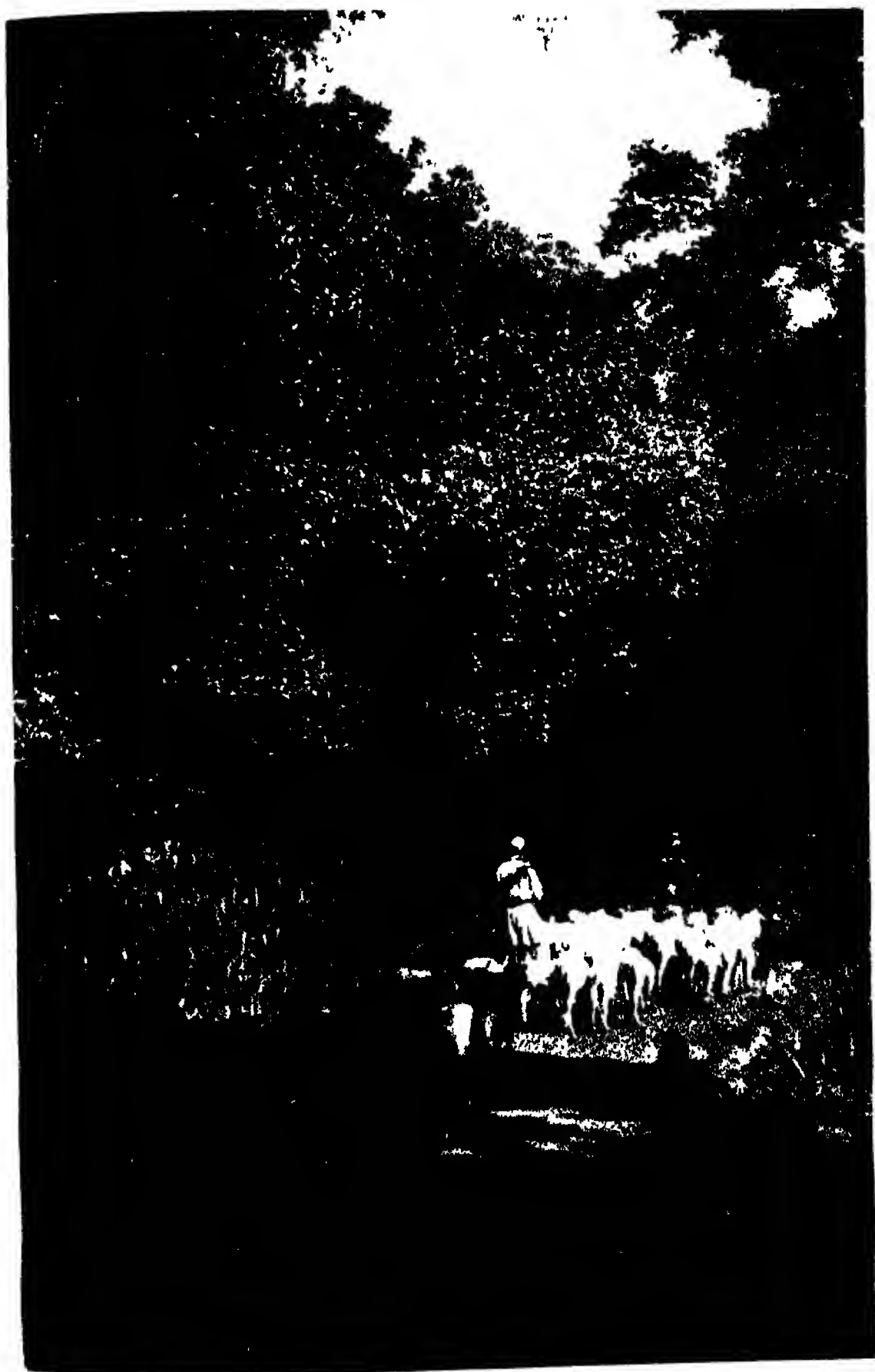




Fig. 4. The Kulu Valley seen from Nigena.

Fig. 5. Women cutting rock overloading for food near Nigena.





A Gaddi shepherd

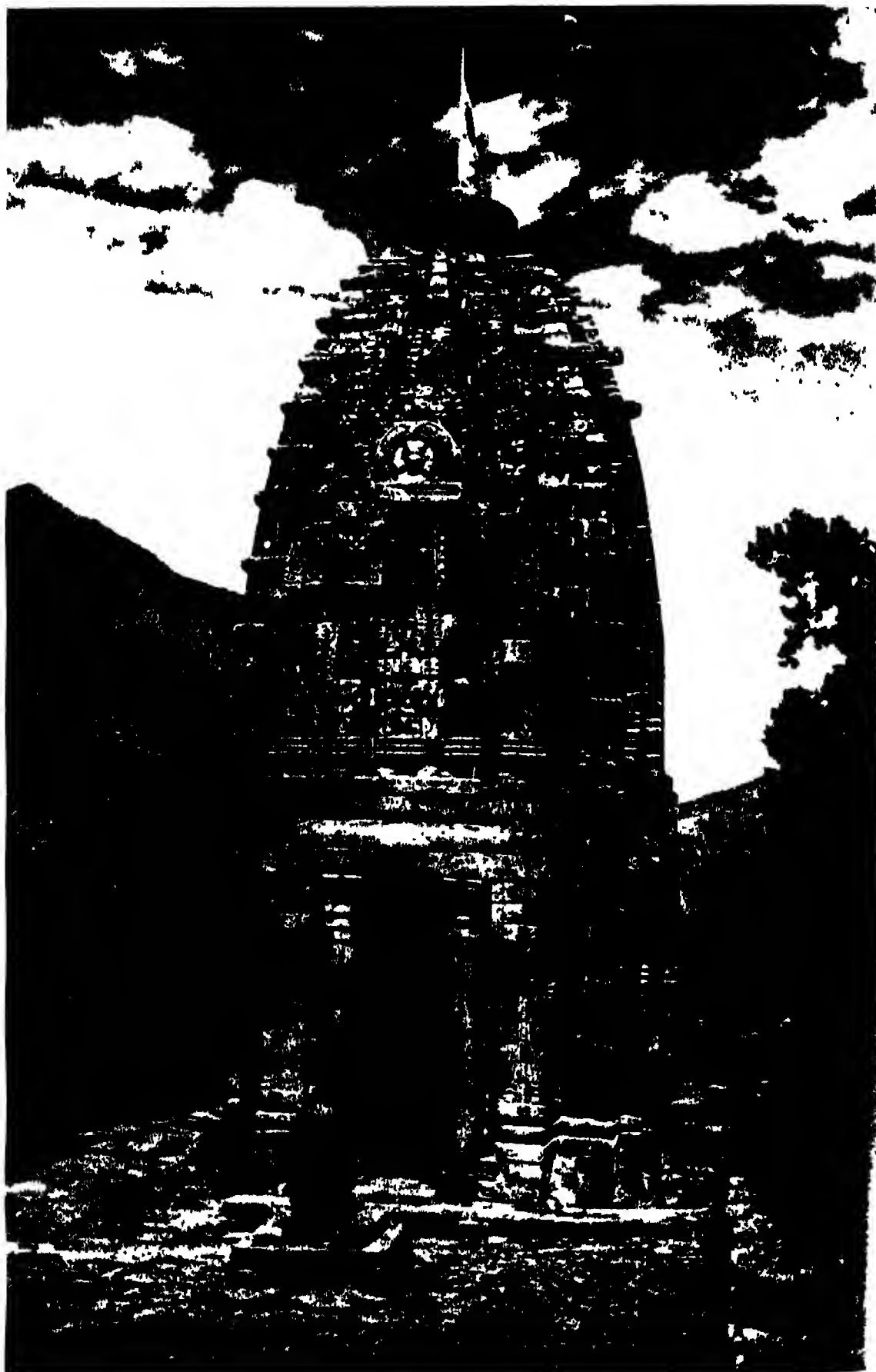


FIG. 51 Shiva temple at Naggar

bilaspur,  
baghal,  
nahan, and  
chamba



## Destruction and Rebirth of a Town

**A**FTER OUR VISIT TO Sundarnagar we decided to pay a visit to Bilaspur, another hill state where considerable painting was done. In ancient days it was known as Kahlur. Bordering the plain of Hoshiarpur, the State now merged in Himachal Pradesh, is divided into two equal parts by the river Sutlej.

The Rajas of Bilaspur claim a lunar origin. The founder of the State Bir Chand came from Chanderi in Bundelkhand about A.D. 900.

Raja Gian Chand (1570-1600), a contemporary of Akbar, became a tributary to the Mughal Empire. He married a daughter of Raja Trilok Chand of Kangra. The Rani was of an independent nature and she somehow did not like her husband. Unlike other Indian women in her position she did not reconcile herself to her situation, and showed her contempt openly for her royal husband. The Raja was deeply hurt by her conduct. On a visit to Kangra he conveyed the following question to her father through his Wazir. "If your shoe pinches what should be done?" The Raja answered: "Cut it and make it fit properly." He accepted the advice, severely chastised the Rani, and afraid of the consequences mounted a swift horse and fled to Bilaspur. An army was sent in pursuit by the Raja of Kangra but could not overtake him, and he reached Bilaspur safely.

A similar incident of domestic discord is related about Kalyan Chand (1630-1645). He was married to a princess from Suket. One day she was playing chess with the Raja and a hill bard recited a poem in which he praised Kalyan Chand as the lord of seven mountain ranges. The Rani asked the bard the names of the seven ranges, and on hearing him recount their names she remarked that the seventh belonged to her father. Kalyan Chand was infuriated and struck her on the head with the chess board, causing a serious injury. The Rani sent a letter to the Raja of Suket, her father, written in blood, describing the incident. Soon after that, Raja of Bilaspur invaded Suket, and during the battle his horse was shot down.

He requested a kinsman for the loan of his horse, but was refused. He was overtaken by the enemy and wounded. He was carried in a palanquin to Kahlur, but died on the way. He was cremated at Kahlur and the Rani burnt herself on the funeral pyre, in spite of the differences she had with him.

No systematic study of paintings from Bilaspur has been done by any scholar so far. Paintings in Kangra style were possibly done during the rule of Devi Chand (1741-1778) and Maha Chand (1778-1824). In 1820 Moorcroft passed through Bilaspur and performed a number of free operations for cataract. He refers to the Raja's palace decorated with flowers in fresco. He found the bazaar in a ruinous state, having been plundered by the Gurkhas a few years ago. He states that the Raja devoted almost the whole of his time to his private pleasures, and left the management of public affairs to his officers who pillaged and oppressed the people.

Maha Chand was followed by an equally worthless successor, his son Kharak Chand (1824-1859). Vigne and Hugel passed through Bilaspur in 1835. Hugel found the Raja entirely in the hands of his wazir. Giving his impressions of the Raja, he writes: "The Raja of Bilaspur has now attained his thirtieth year—a period when the understanding and intellect have reached their prime; but Nature has been a niggard to him in these; and the quantities of opium he swallows have rendered him a disgusting object, with staring eyes devoid of expression, and a mouth always half open. These wazirs, as they were called in the Himalaya, are in point of fact, the real governors of the land, it being looked on as a disgrace for a Raja to concern himself about the administration of his country, or to know how to read or write. His sluggish existence is dragged out in the Zenana, the Indian harem, in eating opium, drinking brandy, and smoking; and in his few sober hours he holds his court or Durbar, or rides from one of his summer-houses to another—The Raja of the Himalaya being thus sunk into a state of stupid imbecility, we need not much wonder if the Wazir is supposed to be an influential favourite of the Rani, or first wife; but it usually happens in these cases, that if the husband's eyes are opened but once to his wrongs, they are soon closed on all things, and for ever."\*

Let me narrate our journey from Sundarnagar to Bilaspur. From the border of Suket onwards, the country is largely barren with only scrub forest. Further on, it improved. Double-storeyed houses of farmers with roofs of slates clustered along the hill-side, with green wheat in the foreground were delightful to behold. Near Baggi the clusters of homesteads were surrounded by gentle terraces studded with mangoes. In the background were pyramidal hills, stately and grand. In October when they are green they are beautiful.

By the time we reached Dehar, where there is a suspension bridge over the Sulej, it was already dark. A pale and melancholy moon was hanging

\* C. Hugel, *Travels in Kashmir and the Punjab*, London, 1845, pp. 24, 25.

over the fortress of Dehar. We stopped for a while to admire the moon. The rest of the journey was simply dreadful. On a winding hill road which was far from smooth, we slowly motored towards Bilaspur. It seemed like eternity and we thought this journey would never end. With great difficulty we reached Bilaspur and stayed the night in the travellers' bungalow, in the heart of the town. In the morning we saw the cave named after Vyas Rishi after whom the river Beas is also named. An old bearded *sadhu* was the custodian of the cave in which an image of Vyas in black stone was sheltered. In ancient times the town was called Vyaspur and it was later on corrupted to Bilaspur. The town was founded by Raja Deep Chand about the middle of the 17th century. Close to the cave, there are royal temples and *sati* stones of the Bilaspur Rajas. Some of the *sati* stones are carved in an artistic manner and are historical records of great importance. The trees in the temple compound are covered with rope-like coils of *Bauhinia vahlii*. Some of them are enormously thick, almost the size of the tree trunks and reminded me of Kangra paintings, in which these climbers are frequently shown coiled around the trunks of trees. On account of the building of the Bhakra Dam, this temple as well as the town of Bilaspur might soon be submerged in the lake. I felt that the *sati* stones deserved to be salvaged.

"What will you do when the flood waters of the lake rise?" I asked the Brahmin priest.

"I will take my *lota* and run away," he replied. He was not in the least concerned about the fate of the temple or the carved stones. Such a display of callousness was indeed disgusting, and the priest did not rise in my estimation.

After seeing the temples and *sati* stones we paid a visit to Raja Anand Chand in his new palace. A lean and thin person, the Raja is one of the most intelligent of the hill chiefs. He is well-read and maintains a large private library. His chief interests are Politics and Economics. He also built a temple of Krishna which was decorated with mural paintings by Sarada Ukil, the Bengali artist who died at Bilaspur when the work he had undertaken was nearing completion. I asked the Raja as to what would happen to the temple and the murals when the level of Govindsagar lake arose. He informed us that the paintings are on canvas and would be taken out, and that he would re-build the temple in the new town where the people of Bilaspur would be re-settled. Then he showed us his collection of paintings, of which three were of outstanding merit. The paintings, showing Krishna playing on the flute by the riverside, and a herd of cattle looking at him as though they were enchanted, was really a master-piece. On my request, he agreed to give these paintings for reproduction and I was very happy to take them with me. Thanking the Raja we said good-bye to the doomed town of Bilaspur, which is now under the water of Bhakra lake.



palaces which get periodically submerged under water were crumbling. However, the stone temples still show remarkable vitality, and are intact, and would remain so for long. When the level of the lake rises their tops could still be seen above the water level. The Vyas Rishi cave has escaped submergence and is intact, though its entrance, is disfigured by a room which the *sadhu* in charge has constructed in order to escape the inclement weather. He confidently narrated that the image of Vyas Rishi was installed by the Pandavas about five thousand years ago. When I told him that it was not more than three hundred years old, and is of Rajasthan origin, he would not accept it. It is surprising how many monuments in India are ascribed to the Pandavas! If the Pandavas reappear they themselves would feel astounded at the fertile imagination of their successors today.

The town itself has been rebuilt on a plateau and some of the houses enjoy a view of the lake. From the Dholra Rest House situated on a rocky shelf, I had a splendid view of the lake and the mountains beyond. The moon rose from behind the mountain range at the back and the lake was a picture. The lights of new Bilaspur were reflected in the water of the lake. On the hill range in front I could see lights in the homesteads and these looked like fire-flies in a forest. It was long way from squalor to modernity. New Bilaspur is certainly an improvement on the old in some ways. The Raja had however, migrated to New Delhi and his two daughters were living in newly-built houses and one of them owned the only cinema in Bilaspur. This is how feudalism is coming to terms with changed conditions.

While returning from Bilaspur to Chandigarh I could not resist the temptation of paying a visit to Nainadevi. Nainadevi is a conspicuous feature of the Shiwalik range and is familiar to all those who travel to see the Bhakra Dam. It is visible even from my home in the fields, in the Garden Colony near Kharar. No visitor to Anandpur can miss it. It is a conical peak capped by a white temple just behind the Gurdwara Kesgarh.

When Guru Gobind Singh was organizing the Sikhs to fight the Mughal oppression, he was advised by the Brahmin priests to perform a *yajna* to Nainadevi, the goddess of power. The *yajna* was carried on for many days but the goddess did not appear. Guru Gobind Singh realized that the main weakness of the Hindus was their belief in supernatural powers, rather than in their own strength. In utter disgust, he threw the ghee, incense, and other paraphernalia into the sacrificial fire, and there was an enormous blaze visible for miles. The credulous believed that the goddess had appeared. When asked whether he had seen the goddess, the Guru unsheathed his sword and said, "This is the goddess." He told them that the goddess is the power which is always in us. It is the conscience of man which refuses to bow before evil. It is the anger which the righteous and truthful men feel when faced with oppression and falsehood. The Guru asked his followers to take up the sword and to fight evil.

A narrow 12 mile road branches off from the Bilaspur-Kiratpur Road

to Nainadevi. We had a splendid view of the Sutlej and the surrounding countryside from this road. After a few miles the Nainadevi temple was visible perched on a hill-top. It gave me an impression of a Buddhist monastery in Lahaul. On the left side, there is a pile of white-washed buildings in which the pilgrims stay. It was almost 12 o' clock when we reached the base of the hill where there are a few shops. A cobbled foot-path leads to the temple. I asked a Brahmin about the shape and appearance of the Devi image. He told me that it is a black lingam on which two eyes are painted. This also explains the name Nainadevi which means the eyes of the goddess. I was expecting to see a sculpture of beauty and power, similar to those I had seen in the temples of Tamil Nadu and Kerala. When I heard the Brahmin's description, my enthusiasm evaporated and I felt that it was not worthwhile going up a steep hill-side at noon under a blazing sun simply to stare at a lingam. Later on I regretted this decision, for there is nothing like gratifying one's curiosity by a personal inspection. I was told that the view from the temple of the surrounding countryside and the sacred town of Anandpur is breathtaking.

## The Painted Palace

**A**RKI, THE CAPITAL of Baghal State in Simla hills was also a centre of painting. Before the merger in Himachal Pradesh, it ranked fourth among the Simla Hill States, had a population of 25,000, and an area of 12,000 sq. miles. J. C. French paid a visit to Arki in October 1929, and he described the frescoes in the Diwankhana, the hall of public audience in the Raja's palace. He also saw a collection of paintings with Mian Basant Singh, a relation of the Raja. Mian Basant Singh's son Mian Chatar Singh was a Sub-Inspector of Police at Simla and he showed me some of the paintings from his father's collection. On a visit to Simla in June, 1958 I met Raja Rajinder Singh of Baghal. He showed me his collection of paintings and agreed to accompany me to Arki.

The road from Simla to Arki passes through Jutogh, a green place with many deodars. From Jutogh onwards the hills are bare and are dotted only with leafless euphorbias and gnarled oaks. The contrast which the barren hills of Baghal, provide with the verdure of Simla, shows the discrimination of the British pioneers who selected Simla as their summer resort.

While the road goes on to Bilaspur, Arki lies to the left in a narrow valley. Arki is 21 miles from Simla, and we covered this journey in an hour and a half. The most imposing structure in Arki is the palace of the Raja situated on a precipitous hill. Below the palace is the town which consists of a cluster of houses whose corrugated iron roofs shine under the clear bright sun. On one side is an old temple. There are a number of gardens of almonds and peaches, recently planted by Raja Rajinder Singh, a progressive farmer and keen horticulturist, who has adjusted himself to the changed conditions.

The Raja's palace, with graceful pavilions and arches, is a good example of Rajasthani style of architecture transplanted in the Himalayas. The flag of the erstwhile State with the emblem of *agni-kund*, an urn containing fire, was flying upside down. The garden in front of the palace was withering. The Raja's younger brother, who met us, said that it was in a much better condition a few years ago and he attributed its decline to his brother who,

he said, did not take much interest. He, however, had not realised that conditions had changed and the Raja's income had dwindled. A part of the palace was occupied by an officer of the Public Works Department of the Government of Himachal Pradesh.

The rulers of Baghal were Parmar Rajputs who claimed their descent from Raja Bhoj of Ujjain. The State of Baghal was carved out by a Parmar adventurer Ajay Dev, who came with his brothers Vijay Dev and Madan Dev from Dhar in Central India when it was invaded by the Muslims. Ajay Dev conquered Baghal and his brother Vijay Dev founded the neighbouring State of Baghal. The third brother Madan Dev also called Dev Dhar Wala acquired celebrity as a saint, and is still worshipped.

The earliest building in the present palace was built by Raja Sabha Chand who ruled from 1640 to 1670. He shifted his capital to the present town of Arki in 1643. Additions to the palace were made by his grandson Rana Mehar Chand, born in 1702, who ruled from 1727 to 1743. The Rajas of Hill States were constantly fighting with each other for slices of border territory. In keeping with the tradition, Bhup Chand (1743-1778) fought many battles with the neighbouring States of Bilaspur and Nalagarh.

In the beginning of the 19th century, the Gurkhas of Nepal dreamt of carving an empire in the Western Himalayas and erupted from their native Nepal under the leadership of Amar Singh Thapa, and reached up to Kangra. On their way they conquered Kumaon, Garhwal, Sirmoor, Baghal and other hill States. In 1805 when Jagat Singh was the Rana, the Gurkhas invaded Baghal, and occupied the palace at Arki which they made their headquarters for all the hill areas under them. This was a dark period for Baghal. The Gurkha rule was stern, and apart from forced labour, they inflicted punishment on the people on the flimsiest excuses. These Gurkhas were rough warriors, robust and hard like the Himalayan rocks. I remember an accident at Almora when a Gurkha on a bicycle came hurtling down a slope and struck against my car. His bicycle was twisted into scrap, but he just walked away as if nothing had happened. This hardihood and stamina no doubt was their asset in their push in the Himalayas but they had no administrative ability and were unnecessarily harsh to the hill people. They regarded forced labour as a prerogative of the conquerors, and would catch hold of any person on the road and make him walk with their baggage. After a long and tiresome journey, they would dismiss him without paying anything. Even for food they paid nothing to the villagers. Apart from the tales of oppression, the only monuments the Gurkhas left behind are traps for panthers in the limestone hill behind the palace, in which live goats were tied as baits. Rana Jagat Singh forced out from his home, lived as an exile in Nalagarh. He came back to Arki only in 1815, when General David Ochterlony defeated the Gurkhas.

The paintings in the collection of the Raja of Baghal can be divided into three groups: Basohli, Kangra and Sikh. Quite a number are in the

primitive style of the hills known as Basohli style. The importance of Baghal collection lies in the fact that quite a number of paintings were painted before Kripal Pal. Some were painted as early as 1645-1670 during the rule of Rana Sabha Chand. A large number of paintings are in Kangra style, some of which deal with the theme of *nayika bheda* and the *Bhagavata Purana*. There is another series in the Sikh style with flowing beards. The Raja of Baghal and his nobles and soldiers adopted the Sikh fashion of keeping uncut hair, and their soldiers also wore uniforms similar to those of the army of Ranjit Singh.

There are a number of portraits of Rana Mehr Chand (1727-1743). In one of the portraits he is shown smoking a *hookah* with two servants in attendance. In another he is riding a horse. On examining the portraits we find that a noteworthy feature is, that the shape of the nose of the Rajas of Baghal, which continues unchanged from Rana Sabha Chand (1640-1670) to the present Raja. The inheritance of the shape of the nose is a strong genetic character. I remember that at the time we were in Haripur-Guler, on seeing Raja Baldev Singh, Archer remarked that he resembled his predecessor, Raja Govardhan Chand. Here too, the resemblance was largely in the shape of the nose.

The last portrait in Basohli style in this series is of Rana Bhup Chand (1753-1768) and may be dated around 1760. The rule of Bhup Chand is remembered for the battles which were fought with the neighbouring States of Bilaspur and Nalagarh. These small hill States were constantly at war with each other, and whenever a weakness was noticed in the neighbouring state, an attack came and a portion of the border territory was sliced off. The affected Raja waited, for his opportunity, and when it came, he recovered his lost territory. Thus the vendetta continued from generation to generation.

Whether the artists who painted these pictures came from Delhi where Shah Jahan (1628-1658) was ruling, or from elsewhere is not known. The established fact is that they were painted earlier than the known Basohli paintings.

It seems that the Kangra style came to Arki during the latter part of the reign of Rana Jagat Singh (1778-1828). Aniruddha Chand, son of Maharaja Sansar Chand, also sought shelter at Arki on his flight to Haridwar in 1829. Some artists may have accompanied him to Arki, and some may have come earlier from Tira-Sujanpur. It seems that painting in Kangra style flourished actively during the rule of Raja Shiv Saran Singh (1828-1840). Shiv Saran Singh was a deeply religious man who built a number of temples and gave gifts of land to Brahmins. He also built the Diwankhana which was decorated with mural paintings during the rule of his son Kishan Singh (1840-1876). The paintings in Kangra style in the collection of the Raja of Baghal deal with the *nayika bheda* theme, Krishna and Shiva-Parvati legends. In these paintings one can see the evolution of painting

from the primitive Basohli to the Kangra style.

Raja Kishan Singh (1840-1876) is regarded as the builder of present Arki town. He extended the palace and built a number of temples. The "pucca" buildings of the bazaar were also constructed during his rule. Around Arki there was plenty of waste land, on which he settled cultivators from Kangra and Bilaspur. Thus agriculture developed and prosperity came to Arki. The paintings of Kishan Singh and his successor Dhian Singh (1876-1904) are in Sikh style.

The frescoes in the Diwankhana were painted during the rule of Raja Kishan Singh near about 1850. They are in decadent Kangra style and are in fairly good state of preservation. The roof has a floral design in which parrots are interspersed with leaves and flowers. On the walls are paintings of Puranic themes and contemporary life. Sikh soldiers on elephants, on horse-back and on foot figure prominently. A procession is led by a Sikh carrying a flag, followed by prancing horses and a lively dog. Below it is Krishna subduing the serpent Kaliya. In another mural a battle between the Sikhs and the Mughals is shown. The battle of Mahabharata with the Kauravas and Pandavas fighting is shown in another panel. There is also a delightful representation of Kalidasa's *Kumarsambhava*. Shiva is in penance and Kamadeva, the God of Love, is shooting an arrow at him from a tree. As he appears on the scene he spreads his net of love over the entire creation. Numerous couples are shown making love. Even animals and *rakshasas* feel the urge for procreation; pairs of snakes are coiled like ropes, a black buck is mating with a female deer. Even hermits in their cells feel the pangs of love. Ascetic Shiva, though he reduced Kamadeva to ashes by the ray of light from his third eye, is also moved and he marries Parvati.

Another panel shows scenes from the *Ramayana*, viz, the monkeys crossing over to Lanka by a bridge of stones. On the top of this panel is shown the British army with a general and his wife seated on an elephant preceded by a formation of troops and guns. It is possible that it represents David Ochterlony who liberated Arki from the Gurkhas.

There are also a number of fantastic paintings among the murals. The Raja of China is represented as a grotesque monster with the neck of a horse and the face of a tiger, followed by his females and leading a nude baby of a similar type. The artist may have got his impression of the Chinese from the Mongolian Kanauras of the Tibetan borderland who have large feline faces.

Contemporary life is depicted in an interesting manner. Gaddi shepherds laden with their belongings are following their goats carrying panniers of salt. The inevitable Gaddi dog follows the flock of goats. Below are acrobats giving a demonstration of their skills; rope walking, and a woman balancing three pitchers on her head. These are familiar scenes from the late nineteenth century rural life in the hills and are depicted with considerable verve and

animation. Above the acrobats is a panel showing Krishna killing Bakasura and lifting the mountain Govardhana. A panel shows the famous Sindhi lover Punnu leading a camel and meeting his beloved Sassi in the town of Bhambor. Below it is a *Ramayana* panel depicting the abduction scene of Sita. Ravana in the garb of a mendicant is asking for alms from Sita, and on the opposite side is Jatayu the giant bird, and Rama and Lakshmana with Hanuman.

A number of unusual pets also appear in these murals. A tiger tied to a tree is devouring a gazelle while his owner is pulling his tail and threatening him with a stick. In another a hefty person is holding the hind legs of a rhinoceros tied with chains.

The theme of composite figures is popular in Indian miniatures. It is also seen in Persian paintings. In murals all over Rajasthan as well as in the Punjab Himalayas, Krishna is sometimes shown riding an elephant, a horse or a palanquin composed of women. Figures of horses and elephants composed entirely of women are seen in the alcoves of the Diwankhana. What is the significance of these composite figures is hard to understand. Tavernier in his *Travels in India* around the middle of the 17th century mentions a visit to Golconda. Describing the public women of Golconda he writes: "These women have so much suppleness and are so agile that when the King who reigns at present wished to visit Masulipatam, nine of them very cleverly represented the form of an elephant, four making the four feet, four others the body, and one the trunk, and the King, mounted above on a kind of throne, made his entry into the town."\* This possibly explains the origin of composite figures of women. Apart from pampering male vanity it shows the agility of women. In some cases this device is used by the artists to show their skill.

The holy cities of the Hindus also figure among the Arki murals. The city of Ayodhya is shown with Rama seated on a terrace; Shiva, Brahma, and Hanuman standing in the foreground. The river presents a lively scene with numerous bathers and a shoal of fish. In another painting, we see Banaras with its familiar *ghats*.

There are also copies of early nineteenth century British paintings. One of these shows an English garden with an English woman in Victorian dress holding a parasol. The murals showing the ports of Calcutta, Goa and Telicherri with ships, were probably copied from contemporary British paintings.

The Arki frescoes are a visual record of contemporary life in the hills of Punjab in the middle of the 19th century. Apart from illustrating religious themes, they tell us how the hill people amused themselves, and what were their geographic conceptions. Their peculiar pets, tigers and rhinoceroses,

\* Jean Baptiste Tavernier, *Travels in India*, translated by V. Ball, London, 1889, Vol. I, p 158.

and their representation of the English, and the Chinese are amusing indeed.

With the rise of the Sikh power in the Punjab, and the extension of Sikh influence in the Hill States, we find a change in the style of painting. The Rajput rulers, when the Mughals were the paramount power, trimmed their beards in Muslim fashion. In fact it is hard to distinguish them from the Mughal nobles. During a visit to the Gwalior Museum in December, 1960, I actually came across a portrait of Maharaja Sansar Chand, labelled as a portrait of a Mughal noble. When the Sikhs under Ranjit Singh became the masters of the Punjab including the hills, the Rajput rulers to please their new masters gave up shaving, and the shearing of beards, and long flowing beards became fashionable. It is thus that the Sikh style, which specializes in portraiture evolved from the Kangra style.

Dhian Singh had an untrimmed flowing beard in the Sikh fashion, and his soldiers also sported the Sikh type rolled beards, and wore uniforms similar to those designed by Ventura and Allard for the Khalsa Army of Ranjit Singh. There is an excellent equestrian portrait of Dhian Singh in the collection of Raja Rajinder Singh.

After we had seen the collections of paintings and the frescoes we had lunch on a platform shaded by a grape-vine. The Raja sat on this platform on festivals when he met his subjects. The journey to Arki was satisfying in the sense, that not only a large collection of paintings was discovered, showing the evolution of Pahari painting from its Basohli phase through Kangra to its Sikh phase, but we also saw such interesting frescoes which, as a record of contemporary life, have a unique value.

The return journey to Simla like most return journeys was dull as we had seen almost everything which was worth noticing, on our way to Arki.



## Mountain Range of the Silver Bangle

**A** CONICAL SNOW-COVERED PEAK is visible from Chandigarh in the months of December to March towards north-east. Hemmed in by the upper Shiwaliks of Kasauli and Sirmur it appears very distinctive. Few people in Chandigarh know its name, and also the fact that it is the nearest snow-peak to the capital city of Delhi. On enquiry I learnt that it bears the picturesque name of *Chun Chandni ki Dhar*—the Mountain Range of the Silver Bangle—and is in the territory of the district Nahan of Himachal Pradesh.

Nahan is well known all over the Punjab as it supplies improved sugarcane crushers to the Punjab farmers. Though not far away from the district of Ambala, I could find no opportunity to visit it. J. C. French, a Bengal civilian, who travelled all over the Punjab Himalaya in search of paintings in 1931, gave a glowing description of Nahan in his book, *Himalayan Art*. "The town of Nahan makes a beautiful picture," says French. "It rises from a great tank of water in tier above tier of red brown houses crowned by white palaces, the whole scene set in pine-clad hills. It has something of the beauty of an old Italian town". Whenever I read this passage it excited my imagination and I felt an urge to visit Nahan.

Nahan was the capital of the hill State of Sirmur whose territories during the Mughal period stretched from the valley of Dehra Dun to Pinjore and it included the present Tehsil of Naraingarh in Ambala district. In 1947, it was integrated in the Union Territory of Himachal Pradesh. The Maharaja of Sirmur mostly resides at Dehra Dun, and Sirmur district is administered by a Deputy Commissioner with his headquarters at Nahan.

It was in the month of February, 1962, that I received a visit from Principal Sharma of the Ram Rai College of Nahan, who requested me to preside over the annual prize distribution function of his college. I regard such functions as tedious and boring. Apart from the physical effort of shaking hands with hundreds of persons one is also expected to make a

speech, giving advice to young men as to what they should do with themselves and their lives. These days young men are in no mood to accept advice, and such addresses are mostly futile. I was inclined to say "no", but my visitor persisted. I was reminded of the description of Nahan left by French as well as of the mysterious mountain range of the silver bangle. I also felt that I must fill this gap in my knowledge of the Punjab Himalayas. I accepted the invitation.

On my return from Patiala on 3 March, 1963, I stayed at the roadside rest house at Shahabad. The sky is usually clear at this time of the year when the wheat is ripening. Quite unexpectedly clouds came and the sky was overcast. There was a heavy downpour. In spite of the rain and the prospect of a storm I was determined to fulfil my engagement, and left Shahabad on the morning of 4 March in my car escorted by a jeep which the Principal had brought for the journey in the hills.

Nahan is no longer remote, and now a metalled road links it with the plains. Most of the hill torrents and streams had been bridged, and the road in the Naraingarh area of Ambala district had been considerably improved. It is in providing communications in the remote and so-called backward areas that Independence has come as the greatest blessing to the people of India. Here was a visible proof of this.

We soon reached the town of Sadhaura. Sadhaura was the headquarters of Banda Bahadur, the Rajput Sikh hero, who made it his base for the crusade against the Mughals. A concrete bridge enables one to cross the mountain torrent with safety, though one has to pay a toll of two rupees. We reached Kala Amb, a village in the foot-hills. Here the Markanda, a hill torrent, named after the sage Markandeya, enters the plains. The scenery becomes interesting. Apart from the fantastic shapes of the eroded rocks, the silk cotton trees covered with cup-like red flowers were pleasing. There is a police post at Kala Amb and a few untidy shops where the travellers take their food and refreshments. The richly painted facade of the house of the village headman, is another attractive sight.

From here onwards there is a gradual climb of twelve miles to Nahan. We passed through a luxuriant sal forest. The glossy dark-green leaves of the sal trees rustling in the wind were delightful. An occasional specimen of *Ougenia dalbergioides* covered with lilac flowers provides a pleasant contrast to the sal trees. The poultry farm run by the Animal Husbandry wing of the Department of Agriculture of the Himachal Pradesh Government ostentatiously located on the road-side reminded us that the town was not far off.

Nahan was founded by Raja Karam Parkash in 1621. Its name derives from nahar, viz. 'tiger,' and it is said that before it was inhabited, it was the abode of tigers. Situated at an altitude of 3057 feet above sea level on an isolated ridge, it enjoys a mild climate. At the entrance to the town is a large masonry gate known as Lytton Memorial which commemorates the visit of the Viceroy, Lord Lytton. The gate is merely ornamental and not

functional, and overlooks the *maidan* which is used as a sports ground. The Raja's palace, a building with no particular architectural character, is a sprawling brick-red structure, situated on the highest point. Nahan owes its prosperity to an enlightened prince Shamsheer Parkash (1856-95), who modernised the State of Sirmur. He had remarkable foresight and realised that economic prosperity of the hills with their scanty land resources, could only be built up by industrialisation. He abolished forced labour, constructed roads and established a foundry at Nahan, where the well-known sugarcane crushers are manufactured.

Principal Sharma provided us with lunch at his residence and then we were taken to the Circuit House in a jeep. The Circuit House is outwardly an attractive white building with a corrugated roof, commanding a broad view of the valley. In front of it is a mountain range of about 6,000 feet height behind which is the much-advertised Renuka Lake, well known for its bird life.

The early history of Sirmur State is almost a blank. Tradition says that its ancient capital was Sirmur, now a mere hamlet surrounded by extensive ruins, in the Kiarda Dun; whose King was of Surajbansi or the Solar dynasty. Once, the legend runs, a woman boasted to the Raja of her acrobatic skill. He challenged her to cross and recross the Giri river on a rope, promising her half his kingdom if she succeeded. The woman crossed in safety; but as she was returning, a courtier, to save the kingdom from dismemberment, cut the rope, and she perished in the river. Nature avenged this act of treachery; a flood swept away Sirmur, and the Raja perished with all his kin, leaving the realm without a ruler. But by chance, soon after the tragedy a prince of Jaisalmer visited Hardwar as a pilgrim, and was there invited by one of the minstrels of the kingdom to assume its sovereignty. He accordingly sent a force under his son, prince Sobha. The prince put down the disorders which had arisen in the State, and became the first Raja of Sirmur, under the title of Subhans Parkash. Parkash is the suffix which the Rajas of Sirmur have ever since adopted. Rajban became the capital of the new King in 1095.

From the reign of Shah Jahan onwards Sirmur had close relations with the Mughal emperors. Mandhata helped Khalilullah, the general of Shah Jahan, in his invasion of Garhwal. Under Aurangzeb, this Raja again joined in the operations against Garhwal. His administration was marked by considerable development of the agricultural resources of the State, and the tract of Kolagarh was also entrusted to him by the emperor.

Budh Parkash (1664-84) was a favourite of Jahanara Begum, the daughter of Shah Jahan. Mughal princesses were not allowed to marry as the emperor had enough trouble with their sons and brothers, and did not like the State affairs to be further muddled by ambitious sons-in-law. Following this policy Jahanara Begum was not married. Manucci describes her as "most lovely, discreet, loving, generous, open-minded and charitable. She was loved by all and lived in state and magnificence with an annual

income of three million rupees, in addition to the revenues of the port of Surat which were assigned to her for her expenditure on betel. She was also fond of drinking wine, which she imported from Persia, Kabul and Kashmir but the best liquor was distilled in her own house from wine and rose-water flavoured with costly spices and aromatic drugs. She used to drink so heavily that they had often to carry her to bed."\* The source of ice for her drinking parties was the snow from the 'Mountain of the Silver Bangle', which was stored in the foot-hills in ice-pits, and from there sent to Delhi in the hot weather. Raja Budh Parkash, apart from supplying ice also used to send musk, wild pomegranates, jungle fowl and pheasants to the princess. She carried on an interesting correspondence with him and in her letters expressed appreciation of the jungle fowls and pheasants which she received from him from time to time.

Whether the close association of the Rajas of Sirmur with the Mughal court, led to the development of painting in this hill state is doubtful. No paintings in the Mughal nor in the early hill style known as Basohli, have been discovered in Sirmur. The Kangra style developed in the Punjab Jammu hill states about the middle of the 18th century. During that period Kirat Parkash (1754-70) was the ruler of Sirmur. Pinjore, with its famous Mughal garden had fallen in the hands of the Sikhs. Kirat Parkash concluded an alliance with Raja Amar Singh of Patiala whom he aided in suppressing his rebellious minister. He then, captured Pinjore along with Morni and Naraingarh. He also supported the Raja of Garhwal in his struggle against the Gurkhas, and for a while compelled them to accept the Ganges as the boundary of their dominions. There is no evidence that any painting was done under Kirat Parkash, and none of his portraits is available.

The dispersal of artists from Guler took place in the last decade of the eighteenth century. Some artists went to Kangra near about that period. Dharam Parkash (1789-93) was invited by the Raja of Kahlur (Bilaspur) to help him against Sansar Chand of Kangra who had invaded his territory. Dharam Parkash fell fighting in a single combat with Sansar Chand and was succeeded by his brother Karam Parkash in 1793. Karam Parkash (1793-1815) married a princess from Guler, and it is most likely that some Guler artists may have reached Nahan during his rule. When Sirmur was invaded by the Gurkhas, the Rani from Guler showed great resourcefulness and courage. Finding the State forces too weak to resist the Gurkhas she invited the British to her aid. Initially the British were defeated and they suffered heavy losses but soon after, they retrieved the situation and by 1815 expelled the Gurkhas. Sirmur was restored to Fateh Parkash (1815-50), son of Karam Parkash and the Guler Rani was appointed as a Regent during his minority. It is very likely that some painting was done during the reign of Fateh Parkash, as his portraits are seen.

\* Manucci, N., *Storia do Mogor*, trans. William Irvine, London, 1906, Vol. I, pp. 216-219.

There was no collection of paintings to be seen even with the Raja. The only relic of importance which he possesses is a sword presented to his ancestors by Guru Gobind Singh which bears the name of the Guru in Gurmukhi script, close to the hilt. The Rajas of Sirmur were friendly with the Guru during his struggle against the Mughal empire. Medni Parkash (1684-1704) gave him asylum and allowed him to fortify Paunta on the Jumna, where the Guru spent many months practising the use of arms and writing poetry in Brijbhasha. The Guru defeated the Rajas of Kahlur and Garhwal at Bhangani in 1688. His sword is ceremoniously carried from the palace to the local Gurdwara once a year and is displayed to the audience. I appreciated the courtesy of the Raja in sending the sword to the Circuit House.

At 5 p.m. I accompanied the Principal to the College to distribute prizes. It was raining as we started and soon there was a terrific hailstorm. Hailstones were beating against the galvanised tin roof of the building like bullets. In the terrific din it was not possible to hear the Principal's report which he continued to read heroically, unperturbed by the disturbance created by the storm. I was glad that the prize distribution ceremony was over and the prize-winners, including boys and girls, enjoyed collecting the cups, medals, certificates and books. All over India there is a great thirst for knowledge, and an eagerness for higher education and these remote hills are no exception. Among the prize-winners were many bright faces full of promise. When I see the young faces of students, their confidence and erect bearing, I feel happy that a new generation of free people are here.

The storm showed no sign of abatement. It had become dark and the road was slippery. It would have been a fool-hardy venture to drive down to the plains in the slashing rain. Hence, I decided to spend the night in the Circuit House. Though outwardly the building looked clean and beautiful the rooms had a foul smell. I asked the *chowkidar* to give an airing to the rooms, and he admitted that a number of bats roost in the roof. The Deputy Commissioner was in bed with influenza, so we were unable to meet him. He was however, kind enough to send me meals to the Circuit House.

Recalling the hardships undergone by the European travellers in the early 19th century, I admired them and forgot the minor discomforts of this forced stay in this place. There were no bungalows in those days, and the travellers' *sarais* in the villages were filthy and full of vermin. They preferred to live in portable tents, even though, these tents did not give adequate protection against heavy rain. Travelling slowly with their baggage carried by hill ponies and coolies, they patiently plodded through the mountains studying the people, vegetation, fauna and economic products. Comparing my own comfort with the hardships of these travellers I felt secure and happy. Electricity suddenly failed, and I had to rely on a *dilmai* kerosene lamp which, according to the seal on it, "was made specially to design in Vienna, Austria". When our modern contrivances fail, how handy

are these old kerosene lamps! At least they are reliable and do not fail us when we require them most.

So far as the paintings were concerned I had drawn a blank. But this is a part of the game and is not a serious disappointment. Even negative evidence has value. Before leaving Nahan I had a keen desire to see the monument for Thackeray, a cousin of the famous novelist, who was killed while fighting the Gurkhas in 1814. It was still drizzling in the morning and the roads were slippery. I came to the judicious decision to leave for Delhi, without seeing anything further. I left with the hope that Nahan may be in a sunnier mood to receive me when I visit it next time.

## Chamba, the Fragrant

**N**AMED AFTER A fair princess and reminiscent of a tree with fragrant flowers, Chamba evokes romantic feelings among people who admire this jewel of the Punjab Himalayas. A folk song from the hills tells that "the lovely one feels happy in the mountains of Chamba, which are bathed in showers of rain." Situated in the bosom of the middle Himalayas, Chamba has preserved its identity inviolate, during the period when the plains were ravaged by fanatical hordes which poured into India from the mountain fastnesses of Central Asia and Afghanistan. It was once the seat of an ancient Hindu kingdom, founded in the middle of the sixth century, and continued its rule, unaffected by the vicissitudes which overtook the kingdoms in the plains of Northern India, till it was absorbed in the Union territory of Himachal Pradesh in 1947, along with the other feudal States of the Punjab Hills. On account of its remoteness, it has preserved its culture, along with its beautiful temples and ancient palaces. It gives us a glimpse of ancient Hindu India in the North, in its pristine beauty.

In the last quarter of the 18th century, the Kangra style of painting, which had its birth at Haripur-Guler, reached Chamba, and young Raja Raj Singh (1764-1794) became its patron. The patronage of artists was continued by his successor, Jit Singh (1794-1808), and grandson, Charhat Singh (1808-1844). Most of the private collections of paintings from Chamba have been sold to dealers and art-lovers from the plains, but Chamba is still fortunate in preserving a large collection in its Bhuri Singh Museum. For this, we must mainly thank the efforts of the scholar-historian, Dr J.P. Vogel, who lived in Chamba for many years, studying its history and archaeology.

Dr Vogel advised the ruling prince, Bhuri Singh, to build a museum where, apart from sculptures, embroideries and carved woodwork, paintings from Chamba and the Kangra Valley, could be displayed. Though substantial discoveries of new paintings were not to be expected, the area having been systematically denuded of its art treasures by art-loving officials and

others, I still felt that at least the Museum collection should be seen. No scholar had yet studied its paintings, and on that account alone a visit to Chamba seemed worthwhile, despite its remoteness and the difficulties of access.

An opportunity came my way in April, 1960, when my friends Dr W.G. Archer and Dr Mulk Raj Anand suggested a tour to the place. We were returning from our trip to Kangra, Mandi and Suket and were back in the Forest Rest House at Nurpur. Leaving Nurpur early in the morning, we crossed the Chakki river and turned again towards the Himalayas. April is a very pleasant month in the lower hills. Nature puts on the smile of spring and the air is heavy with the fragrance of flowers. There are a number of orange groves in the foothills which exhale an exquisite fragrance. Even the barren rocks and mountains are covered with the *Adhatoda vasaka*, whose white flowers are full of honey. Shrubby Easter trees are swathed with fragrant white blooms, and mauve and pink orchid-like sprays of blossoms burst from the mutilated dark branches of the kachnars.

There is one-way traffic on this road, and we spent some time at the rest house at Donera waiting for the downward vehicles to pass. We had our lunch at a small rest house on the way to Dalhousie. Situated on a mountain spur, this bungalow provides an excellent view of the Ravi and of the town of Basohli. From this point began a steep uphill climb which ended only at Banikhet. Here, there was a pleasant meadow surrounded by a forest of pines. From Banikhet we climbed again till we reached the outskirts of Dalhousie. The road to Chamba forks left, at this point. The bridge-road from Dalhousie to Chamba is, no doubt, far more interesting, but we decided to go by car, taking the new road. This decision was dictated by our desire to economise on time, and to reach Chamba quickly. Moreover, my companions from distant parts would not have liked to walk to Chamba.

After we had descended a few miles, the smooth tarred road ceased to be in evidence. A narrow track, littered with loose stones, which were a menace to the car, soon made us regret our decision. At many places we had to get down to remove the stones and boulders out of the way of our car, which had a low clearance. As we gazed at the dreadful gorges and chasms falling away to our left, we were full of praise for our driver, Rasil Singh, who skilfully negotiated many narrow corners. We were going down deeper, ultimately to reach the level of the Ravi, which we crossed by a suspension bridge.

The sun had set, darkness was falling, and as we reached the Circuit House at Chamba, we breathed a sigh of relief that at last the dreadful journey was ended. The Circuit House was once the quarters of the British Resident and is now used by officials and important visitors. Its large rooms were gloomy and comfortless. The heavy curtains and dark-brown Victorian furniture, further added to the gloom which pervaded the place. I thought of the cheerful modern buildings of Chandigarh, with their large glass



windows which establish contact with nature and provide open view of the mountains.

After everyone was allotted a room, the dinner, which consisted of curried mutton, was brought in. The fatigue of the journey and its danger had given us good appetite. When the lights were switched off and we prepared to go to bed, it was with every anticipation of seeing some imperial ghosts in this sombre building. The rooms were still dark at 9 a.m. Sunshine is a rare commodity in Chamba, which is hemmed in by high hills on all sides. It is not before 10 a.m. that the sun can be seen in the sky, and by 3 p.m. or earlier, it disappears. We wondered why such heavy curtains had been provided to shut out the light, when the sun could be seen only for a few hours. The only pleasant thing about the Circuit House was the wooden verandah at the back, from which the roar of the river could be heard unceasingly.

We had allowed ourselves three days here, to see the temples, the ancient palaces decorated with murals, the embroideries and the collection of miniatures, both private and public. The news of our arrival, had already reached the ears of most of those who knew something about Kangra paintings, and also, of those who possessed collections. Some years ago I had purchased a series of beautiful paintings of the Krishna-Rukmini theme from Mian Nihal Singh of Chamba, a retired officer of the Provincial Civil Service. The faces of the women in these paintings indicated that the artists from Guler must have migrated to Chamba from the court of Raja Prakash Chand, who incidentally had a Rani from this place. The painters were patronised by the young Raja Raj Singh, and in a painting we see him listening to music, when he was hardly 16 years of age.

The collections in Chamba indicate a strong link between the local art and that of Guler. One of our visitors showed us a very delightful picture of Krishna sporting with the Gopis on the bank of the Jumna, under the light of the full moon. Unfortunately it was marred by a smear of fat. The picture was indeed a masterpiece and I felt sorry that it had been ruined due to the carelessness of the owner. How many Kangra paintings must have been damaged or lost, through the neglect and indifference of their possessors, who did not realise their worth!

The paintings so far shown to us were adequate neither in number nor in quality, to satisfy us for the trouble we had taken in visiting the locality, at so much risk to our car as well as to our own lives. While brooding over the impasse, I received a visitor who introduced himself as a retired tehsildar with an interest in horticulture. I have a great regard for horticulturists, and for a while we discussed the problem of growing apples in Chamba.

"Where is your orchard?" I asked.

"Fifteen miles from here. It is a flat piece of land, irrigated by a spring."

"Do any pests damage your crop?"

"The biggest pests are the school boys of the neighbouring village. They

are more destructive than the monkeys. They prefer to sample the fruits when they are actually unripe!"

"I have a collection of paintings to show you," said my visitor. "It belongs to a person who does not like to disclose his identity. Could you come to my house tomorrow at 10 a.m. for a cup of tea and see them?"

I was delighted to receive this news and immediately informed my companions, who were no less excited at the prospect of seeing this collection of paintings. With what impatience we waited for the dawn of the morrow it is hard to tell. Dr. Anand, meanwhile, had received an invitation from the Principal of the local Government College for a talk on Indian Art. In this backwater of Chamba, where people of such experience and attainments are rare visitors, the lecture evoked considerable interest among the citizens. The only complaint we heard next morning was from an art-loving drawing master of a school, who said that the invitation for the lecture had been so severely restricted as if an atomic bomb were to be exploded! We wished that the organizers had shown greater liberality in inviting people.

The town of Chamba derives its name from Champavati, a daughter of Raja Sahila Varman (A.D. 920). The ancient capital of the State was Brahmaur, earlier known as Brahmapura. Champavati happened to see the plateau on which the town now stands. A flat piece of land in the hills is indeed a rarity, and the Raja's daughter took a fancy to the site and asked her father to build a town upon it. But this piece of land had been earlier gifted to Brahmins, who were unwilling to part with it. Ultimately a deal was struck and the Raja agreed to give them eight copper coins in perpetuity on the occasion of every marriage in the family. On this condition the land was given and the town was built and named Chamba, after Champavati.

Next arose the question of water supply. A channel was made from a neighbouring stream, but the water would not enter. In those days the science of hydraulics was unknown, and human sacrifices to propitiate the spirits of the water were common. Even to ensure the stability of forts, human beings were sacrificed and buried in the foundations. To propitiate the spirit of this stream, the Brahmins advised that the Rani or her son be sacrificed. Accompanied by her maidens, the Rani willingly mounted the spot where the water-course joined the main stream. There a grave was dug and she was buried alive. It is said that once the grave was filled, the water began to flow, and since then Chamba has had an abundant supply. In the memory of the Rani, a temple was erected and a fair called the Sulu Mela, which is attended only by women and children, is held there in the month of March. Dressed in their best clothes, the women climb the steps to the shrine and sing songs in the Rani's praise.

Another festival celebrated in Chamba is known as the festival of Minjar. It is held in the autumn when the maize ripens. Formerly, the Raja, in his traditional dress of gold brocade and preceded by drums and trumpets, was carried in procession across the *maidan* to inaugurate the fair. Now that

the State no longer exists, we were told that the Deputy Commissioner of the District is taken out in procession. There is an opinion that, an official is a rather poor substitute for the splendidly-clad Raja, who, apart from the prestige of his ancestry, was an impressive figure. Moreover, the shoddy Western clothes worn by the officials wholly fail to create an aura of grandeur to which citizens of Chamba had been accustomed.

The people of the locality, in dress, language and appearance, are hardly distinguishable from the Punjabis of the plains. But refugees from the North-West Frontier Province, whose wooden stalls have disfigured the *maidan*, have brought with them a tradition of roughness and violence which makes them stand out from the indigenous population. It is the Gaddis, the shepherds of the Chamba hills, who lend character to the town. Their kilted men with coils of black rope around the waist, and handsome women laden with silver ornaments and necklaces of amber beads are very attractive.

The temples of the ancient capital are noble specimens of Hindu temple architecture. The temple of Vishnu, or Lakshminarayana, was built by Sahila Varman. The marble for the images was brought from the Vindhya mountains. Sahila Varman is still remembered by the people of Chamba. The latter part of his life he spent in retirement at Brahmaur, the ancient capital.

Like most hill capitals, Chamba has a large *maidan*. The town stands to the north of this and rises in a series of tiers. The most outstanding buildings are the palaces of the Raja. Of these the Rang Mahal, or painted palace, which looks like a feudal castle, with towers on either side, is undoubtedly the most interesting. When French visited Chamba in 1931, he could not go inside, because a Rani was living there. There is one room the walls of which are painted with murals depicting episodes from the *Ramayana* and the *Bhagavata Purana*, in bright red and blue.

Some of the verandahs are also adorned with murals, which have unfortunately fallen victims to the vandalism of the cottage industries enthusiasts who had installed handlooms, and have recklessly damaged a number of paintings. Beautifully decorated rooms, which would have been valued and preserved as national monuments in other countries, have all been damaged through neglect. The roof of the room which contains the best murals was leaking badly, and to judge by the present auspices, there would be no trace left of the paintings in another few years. What the hand of man created with loving imagination and patient labour would be destroyed as a result of the apathy of our generation. It is surprising that all this should happen under a Government which has given so much encouragement to art and culture, by establishing several Academics.

After examining the murals of the Rang Mahal and expressing regret and indignation at their sad condition, we decided to explore the town. There are a number of shops of goldsmiths, who manufacture jewellery which finds a ready sale with the hill women. Dr Anand has a special

sympathy for goldsmiths, which he expresses volubly, claiming kinship with them. The goldsmiths, in their turn, were very happy to find such an eminent writer claiming caste relationship with them, and as proof of their joy and satisfaction they sold him a beautiful brass image, which was indeed a work of art.

Next, we saw the art treasures of the Bhuri Singh Museum. Apart from paintings from Kangra and Chamba, the Museum contains some remarkable pieces of carved woodwork from Brahmaur. Inscriptions on stone from springs and temples, which Dr Vogel had so painstakingly collected from remote places in the State, are precious witnesses to the history of Chamba. I have nothing but praise for Vogel, who lived at Chamba for many years absorbed in patient research work on the history of the area. Others similarly placed would have found their existence dull and boring. The Museum building is of timber, and how far it was wise to place such priceless treasures in so combustible a structure is open to question. It seemed to us rather risky.

Chamba is well known in the hills for its beautiful Gaddi women. I remembered my first visit to the town in 1928, when I accompanied the late Professor Shiv Rain Kashyap, with a party of students, on a botanical tour of the Himalayas. Before we entered the town the Professor warned us about the enchantresses of Chamba. As we descended to the *maidan*, we did see some attractive specimens. A comely maiden carrying a brass pot on her head was hurrying back home, from a spring. Our photographer Harbans Singh seeing so charming a subject for a picture, pointed the lens of his camera at her. On seeing the camera, she increased her speed and disappeared. My sympathy was with her, for the photographers who have begun to go to the hills in large numbers to collect pictures of hill beauties, have undoubtedly become great pests.

On account of its remoteness, Chamba, in its day, was an asylum for refugee princes from the neighbouring States. Raja Bir Singh of Nurpur, when he escaped from the tyranny of Ranjit Singh, sought refuge in the town, where he was seen by Vigne, the English traveller, who was the first European to visit it. Vigne was favourably impressed with the outlying villages. He writes, "The village houses were whitewashed and thatched, with a neatness that would not have disgraced those of England; thick tops or clumps of mango trees were plentiful among them; and the whole aspect of the country told favourably of the Raja's Government."

The Raja at that time was Charhat Singh. Vigne, who was a painter, requested the ruler to allow him to paint his portrait. Vigne states that the Raja agreed, sat like a statue and was finally so pleased with his likeness that he was obliged to present it to the Raja. He next turned his attention to Raja Bir Singh. Vigne writes, "After I had succeeded tolerably with poor Bir Singh, I handed the drawing to Charhat Singh for his inspection, who upon seeing the low, melancholy face of his Quixote-looking brother-

in-law portrayed upon paper, was wholly unable to check a disposition to laughter and burst into a long-continued chuckle, in which all regard for oriental gravity and decorum was quite forgotten."\*

We decided to return by the bridle-road which passes through Khajiar and Dalhousie. After a stiff climb we reached an altitude of 6,000 ft. and had an excellent view of the town of Chamba, with its whitewashed houses and glittering corrugated roofs. Surrounded by a grand forest of cedars, the beautiful meadow of Khajiar is undoubtedly one of the most charming spots in the Himalayas. The cedars of Lebanon are known all over the world for their antiquity and stateliness. But surely they cannot compare with those of Khajiar, in age as well as the majesty of their surroundings. In the centre is a small lake with a floating island and on one side an attractive Hindu temple. Passing through a grand forest of cedars and firs, we finally reached Dalhousie, whence we motored down to the plains again. We were happy to have seen Chamba and its art collections.

\* Vigne, *Travels in Kashmir and Ladakh*, Vol. I, London, 1842

garhwal



## Palace in the Wilderness

**T**EHRI-GARHWAL WAS THE easternmost State in the Western Himalayas which came in the sweep of the great Kangra art. Though I had explored all places connected with the paintings in the Punjab Himalayas, Tehri-Garhwal remained a glaring gap in my travels in search of paintings. In 1959 while I was sitting in my office room in the Indian Council of Agricultural Research, New Delhi, I received an unusual visitor, a Professor of English literature from Oxford University. He had read W. G. Archer's book on *Garhwal Painting* and was fascinated by the paintings and even more so, by the poetic style of the book. Under the spell of that book, he came all the way to India to see Garhwal and its paintings. I directed him to meet the Maharaja of Tehri-Garhwal, who lives in New Delhi. Later on I myself happened to meet the Maharaja and requested him to show me his collection of paintings. The Maharaja said that these paintings were in his palace at Narendra Nagar in Tehri-Garhwal and could only be seen there. Perhaps the Maharaja was wise in keeping these paintings in his mountain home. The art of the Punjab Himalayas is fascinating and appears delightful in any place, Delhi, Bombay, London or New York. But it is much more so, when you see it in its native mountains. Then not only do you see the paintings, but also the environment under which the art grew. I remember when I was in Ambala in 1952, I invited a party of hill men of Kulu for a dance performance under a cultural festival programme in the cantonment. I had seen these men performing a sword dance at Kulu some years ago. Against the background of mountains their dance was enchanting and kept me spell-bound for hours. Here in the monotonous Punjab plains its charm was lost.

Busy with my official work, I often felt that the occasion for seeing the paintings from the collection of the Maharaja may never come. In March 1960 came my opportunity, when my friend Dr W.G. Archer came to India on my invitation to study material on Indian miniatures. We planned a tour of Garhwal, Kangra, Mandi, Suket, Chamba and Jammu. As it happened, this interesting tour began with a journey to Narendra Nagar in Tehri-Garhwal.



We took the train from Delhi, and from behind the glass-panes of the compartment saw the country-side of western Uttar Pradesh. The Himalayas in the north, from its snow-covered peaks to its low undulating foothills, is one of the most interesting regions in the world. Kerala, parts of Madras, Mysore and the coastal area of Maharashtra through which runs the purple mountains of the Western Ghats dotted with plantations of tea and coffee and their lower reaches covered with graceful coconut and areca palms, have a mellow beauty of their own. The flat and monotonous Indo-Gangetic alluvial plain of Uttar Pradesh and Bihar is attractive only in some months. From May to July it wears a particularly depressing and forlorn look, with bare fields dotted with ugly mud huts huddled in unsightly clusters which are really a blot on the landscape. The towns with their narrow crooked lanes are dull and drab, and have grown in a haphazard manner like mushrooms on a dung heap. While in the Punjab ravaged by the partition and its aftermath, modern architecture and town planning have found a place in the development of at least its capital city, Chandigarh, it is not so, in the heart-land of India, Uttar Pradesh and Bihar—the Hindustan of common parlance. The towns-people give an impression of lack of energy. Their lethargy is perhaps explained by their vegetarian diet and the low intake of proteins. The dress of the peasantry is drab, white home-spun *dhotis* and shirts, which soon acquire the same colour as the soil, are seldom washed, and only removed when they are in tatters. The soil is fertile, and so is man. A teeming humanity surrounds one here.

Perhaps this has been so for the last four centuries. Babur, who had a keen sense of observation and whose memoirs stand unrivalled for their literary and historic value, thus gives his impressions of India of the early sixteenth century. "Hindustan is a remarkably fine country. It is quite a different world compared with other countries. Its hills and rivers, its forests and plains, its animals and plants, its inhabitants and their languages, its winds and rains are all of a different nature." Then commenting on the towns and the country of the Gangetic plain he says: "The country and the towns of Hindustan are extremely ugly. All its towns and lands have a uniform look; its gardens have no walls; the greater part of it is a level plain. The banks of its rivers and streams, in consequence of the rushing of the torrents that descend during the rainy season, are worn deep into the channel, which makes it generally difficult and troublesome to cross them. . . . And if, on the other hand, they intend to settle on any particular spot, as they do not need to run water-courses, or to build flood-mounds, their crops being produced without irrigation, and the population of Hindustan being unlimited, inhabitants swarm in every direction."\*

With all its faults, the northern country has its charm and those who

\* Babur, *Memoirs of Zahir-ed-Din Muhammed Babur*, translated by John Leyden and William Erskine, London, 1921, Vol. II, pp. 201, 207.

have felt it once always think of it when they are away from it, and wish to return. Behind the drabness of clothes, is a warm heart and genuine hospitality. The flowers of the temperate lands have bright colours but no fragrance. He who has enjoyed the fragrance of motia, champa, keora and moulisari and tasted the *samar-e-bahisht* mangoes, would not yearn for phloxes, larkspurs and apples! What is true of vegetation is also true of man. In the cold efficiency of the West it is the warmth of fellow-feeling which we miss most – particularly we of the peasant stock, from the countryside of northern India.

In the morning we found ourselves at Hardwar, the holy city on the Ganges. The Maharaja had sent his car to fetch us, and after loading our luggage including photographic equipment, we started for Narendra Nagar. On our way we passed through the forest of Rishikesh, alive with red- and black-faced monkeys swinging from the branches of trees, and we also had glimpses of spotted deer among the trees of the forest. How cleverly they are camouflaged, and it is so easy to miss them when they stand motionless under the trees.

After about twenty miles, the sal forest ended, and we started ascending a hill ultimately reaching the pine belt. In about half an hour, we spiralled our way to the hill-top and reached the mountain retreat of the Maharaja at Narendra Nagar. Tehri, the old capital, was abandoned by Maharaja Narendra Shah on account of its remoteness, and in 1930, he built Narendra Nagar, which is named after him. This was done so that he could live in the mountains, and at the same time could have easy access to the plains. From the palace there was a splendid view of the Doon and Rishikesh Valleys. The Ganges meandering in the valley, appeared like a streak of molten silver, and on one side was Rishikesh, with its lime-washed houses, the abode of hermits and recluses.

We spent some time admiring the mountains, the pine forest, and the valley. We were shown our rooms by the Maharaja's servants, and we rested for a while. Shortly after, we were taken to the dining room where we had lunch with the Manager of the Maharaja. When the lunch was over, we rested for an hour in our rooms. It was 2.30 p.m. and still there was no sign of the Maharaja, nor of the paintings. On enquiry we learnt that he was at his prayers.

We were getting anxious about the paintings particularly in view of our desire to catch the night train from Hardwar. "Shall we see the paintings, or be given only polite excuses?" In this state of suspense and anxiety I was pacing the terrace on the roof of the palace. At that moment, appeared the Maharaja, dressed in a grey *achkan*, cool and calm. He gave us a polite welcome and I introduced Dr. Archer to him. We were inclined not to waste any more time on formalities, and I requested him to show us his collection of paintings. Three portfolios were brought. One contained the paintings of the *Sat Sai*, another a mixed lot of paintings from Kangra,

Garhwal and Basohli, and the third an album with the famous paintings of the *Gita Govinda*. The colophon of the *Gita Govinda* paintings, which contained the controversial inscription mentioning the name of the artist, Manku, was also found. It was sheer joy to go through the paintings of the *Gita Govinda* with their cool colours and exquisite lines. On scanning the album, Archer remarked that the series was not complete, and the paintings of Canto XII in which Jayadeva describes the union of Radha and Krishna were missing. The Maharaja said that these were kept separately, because the artist had handled the theme in a bold and frank manner, and they were not meant to be seen by everybody. Ultimately these paintings were also produced and we enjoyed seeing them.

I was particularly delighted to see the illustrations of Bihari's *Sat Sai*, the first couplet of which was composed to awaken a pleasure-loving prince of Amber, to the sense of his responsibilities. When I reflect on the behaviour of his young wife, who kept him amused for about a year oblivious of his administrative responsibility, I am reminded of the conscientious Lady Chiang, wife of Prince Hsuan, who locked herself in the women's jail, as the Emperor overstayed in bed, neglecting his public business!

To understand the paintings from Tehri-Garhwal it is necessary to have a background of its history. The early history of Garhwal, like most hill states, is obscure. The country was ruled by a number of petty chiefs. In the middle of the fourteenth century, a Rajput Raja named Ajay Pal conquered the petty rulers and settled at Dewalgarh.

Mahipat Shah founded Srinagar as his capital in the early seventeenth century. Following him we find the word 'Shah' suffixed to the names of all the Rajas of Garhwal. In 1654 Shah Jahan sent an expedition against Raja Prithi Shah and the Doon valley was taken away from Garhwal State.

In 1658 Sulaiman Shikoh, son of Dara Shikoh, came as a refugee to Garhwal and he lived for some time at Srinagar. He was accompanied by two Hindu artists, Sham Das and his son Har Das who were trained in the Mughal style of painting. These artists settled down at Srinagar. It was thus that the art of painting was introduced in the State which was economically poverty-stricken.

Aurangzeb had become the Emperor of India after imprisoning his father, Shah Jahan, and murdering his brothers, and was now thirsting for the blood of his nephew, Sulaiman Shikoh. He threatened Prithi Shah, demanding that Sulaiman Shikoh be delivered to him. The Raja came to the conclusion that it was not wise to embroil himself with the Mughal army, and he delivered the refugee prince to Aurangzeb, after depriving him of his property. Sulaiman Shikoh was confined by Aurangzeb in Gwalior Fort where his life was ended by slow poisoning.

Towards the close of the seventeenth century the Chand Rajas of Almora attempted to take Garhwal. Jagat Chand drove Pradip Shah (1717-1772), the Raja of Garhwal, from his capital, Srinagar. In 1779 Lalit Shah defeated

the usurper, who was ruling Kumaon, and made his own son, Parduman Shah (1785-1803) the Raja of that territory. After some years Parduman Shah, tired of the intrigues of the Joshis and Pantis of Almora, came back to his capital, Srinagar, abandoning Kumaon.

In 1803 the Gurkhas overran Garhwal and conquered Dehra Dun. Parduman Shah was weak, effeminate, and hardly cut out for the role of a warrior. Confronted by the Gurkhas he lost his nerve. His capital at Srinagar was destroyed in 1802 by an earthquake which rendered his palace uninhabitable. Frequent shocks took place extending over a period of several months, streams ran dry, and there was widespread devastation. These portents, coupled with the gloomy prophecies of his astrologers, completely demoralised Parduman Shah. Defeated by the Gurkhas, he fled to the plains and there collected a force of Garhwalis in 1804. He fought the Gurkhas but was killed along with his Garhwali retainers.

The period 1804-1815 is a dark chapter in the history of Garhwal. The Gurkhas ruled Garhwal with an iron hand. Fines were their main source of revenue, and they were inflicted on trivial excuses. Apart from this, they adopted many devices to harass the population. They even forbade Garhwali women from ascending the tops of their houses. For domestic work, particularly drying grain and clothes and for storing fire-wood, it was necessary for women to climb to the roofs of their houses. This restriction caused serious discomfort to the people, and generated a good deal of resentment. Uncultivated fields, deserted huts and a ruined economy—these were the results of the unimaginative and harsh rule of the Gurkhas.

One of the artists of Garhwal was Mola Ram, a descendant of Har Das. He used to paint in the Mughal style and, after a visit to Kangra during the reign of Sansar Chand, he learnt painting in the Kangra style. His paintings in Kangra style are, however, rigid and lack the grace and suppleness which are the main characteristics of the art of Kangra. Mola Ram has been given a fictitious importance by Mukandi Lal, a Garhwal scholar, who has attributed paintings in diverse styles to the former. During the period of Gurkha occupation, Mola Ram, who was also a poet, ingratiated himself with the Gurkha commander, Hastidal, and continued to live at Srinagar.

There are some paintings from Garhwal very likely painted at Srinagar, which are far superior to those painted by Mola Ram. One of these paintings bears the name of the artist Chaitu. Archer believes that some artists from Guler migrated to Srinagar. Guler is the birth-place of Kangra painting and it is very likely that such a movement may have taken place, and the better products of Garhwal are the works of these artists.

The Gurkhas were ultimately defeated by the British in 1815. As a price for their intervention the British annexed most of Garhwal, and Sudarshan Shah (1814-1859) was left with only a part of the State. Sudarshan Shah took up his residence at the village of Tehri in 1815 and he made it his capital. The State was also called Tehri after the capital.

On analysing the styles of the paintings, we found that the most beautiful paintings which belonged to the large series of the *Gita Govinda* and *Sat Sai* were painted not in Tehri-Garhwal, but in the distant Kangra Valley. How did these paintings reach Tehri-Garhwal?

After the death of Maharaja Sansar Chand in December 1823, his son Rai Aniruddha Chand succeeded him. However, he was Raja only in name and had to go frequently to the court of Ranjit Singh at Lahore to pay the feudal dues. In 1828, Aniruddha Chand paid a visit to Lahore with his family. He had with him his two sisters. Raja Dhian Singh of Jammu, who was the chief adviser to Maharaja Ranjit Singh, happened to see them and he wanted Aniruddha Chand to marry them to his son Hira Singh, a handsome boy who had become a great favourite at the court.

The pride of the Katoch chief, who belonged to the oldest ruling family of the Punjab hills, was roused at the proposition of so degrading an alliance. He temporised under the pretence of consulting his mother. On arrival at Nadaun he had to choose between his kingdom and honour. He chose the latter. He sent his mother along with his two sisters in secrecy across the Sutlej and they took refuge in the hills under British protection. On 16 October, 1828, Aniruddha Chand also followed, leaving his possessions at the mercy of Ranjit Singh.

Aniruddha Chand along with his two sisters, carried the best paintings from the collection of his father, including those of the *Gita Govinda*, and illustrations to Bihari's *Sat Sai* to Hardwar where he took shelter. The two princesses were married to Raja Sudarshan Shah of Tehri-Garhwal in 1831, and the paintings were given as a dowry. At the close of the same year Aniruddha died of paralysis. It is thus that these famous Kangra paintings came to Tehri-Garhwal. Some of the surviving artists also seem to have migrated to Tehri-Garhwal, and some of the nineteenth century paintings from Garhwal which were not painted by Mola Ram, were possibly painted by these artists in the decadent Kangra style.

Amrik Singh, the photographer of the National Museum who had accompanied us, busied himself photographing the paintings. There were so many paintings to be copied, and he had started late and we had to leave by 7 p.m. He worked like a demon exposing roll after roll of film and the room was littered with empty spools. By the time the call for dinner came, he had exposed all the films which he had brought with him.

We had to return the same night to Hardwar to catch the train for Delhi. The Garhwali driver inspired by a generous dose of country liquor made a mad down-hill dash, and it was a miracle indeed that we reached Hardwar in an hour and a half. How we were saved from the steep gorges on the side of the narrow ribbon-like road can hardly be described. After all this hurry we just missed the train by five minutes. We were in low spirits, but the driver was unbeaten, and with his characteristic

recklessness chased the train, overtook it, and deposited us safely at the railway station of Roorkee.

While we missed the train at Hardwar we were ahead of it by an hour at Roorkee. Waiting for a train is a tedious and boring affair anywhere, but it was much more so at Roorkee particularly considering the hurry in which we overtook it by car. There was no book-stall where one could browse over journals and the flashy covers of paper-backs. On the platform was a large crowd of people, some dozing on steel benches, a few chewing betel leaves, some talking and quite a few spitting and clearing their throats and producing weird sounds like roaring lions. How beautiful were the Kangra paintings of the *Sat Sai* and the *Gita Govinda*! In contrast how unattractive was the humanity on the railway platform!

When the train came we traced our reserved compartments, spread our beds on the seats and prepared to go to sleep. Lying in bed, the images of all the beautiful paintings appeared in my mind like a colour film. For the rest of the journey I was thinking of the Kangra miniatures of the *Sat Sai*, and the one showing Radha and Krishna in a dark street under the soft light of the stars, particularly stuck in my memory. It had a strange atmosphere of beauty and mystery, and a haunting quality. I dreamt of it for the rest of the journey.

These paintings depict a charmed world of fantasy and romance. Contrasted with the drabness of the plains of Uttar Pradesh through which we passed, this art appeared like a butterfly beating its iridescent wings over a putrid marsh. The study of this charming art born in the pure air of the Punjab hills is perhaps an escape from the sordid reality of life, the grinding poverty of India, its wretchedness and filth. We always imagine a golden age existed in the past. Viewed from the distance of time the cruelties and treacheries of that period disappear, just as the harsh contours of the earth are mellowed when we are flying high in the air.



**simla hills**





## Mount Olympus

**F**OR OVER A CENTURY the white gods looked down upon the lesser beings who inhabited the plains of Hindustan from their Mount Olympus in the Western Himalayas. Simla, as it came to be known, was discovered in 1817 by two Scottish officers of the Survey of India, the Gerard brothers, Patrick and James. They camped on the side of Jakhu, and were struck by the extensive and beautiful prospect of the surrounding mountains. Splendid forests of the Himalayan cedar, the deodar clothed the mountains. The sombre forests of white oaks were lit up with splashes of brilliant scarlet provided by the blossoms of rhododendron. In the crowns of trees scampered the langurs, the black-faced monkeys with long cord-like tails. It was the month of August when the Gerards passed through the small village called Simla. To the north they saw the snow-covered crescent of the mountains of Kulu and Spiti. They were impressed by the cloud scenery which spreads over the deep valleys, and the mountain ranges that ascend in huge waves to the summits of the inner Himalayas which border Tibet. During the breaks in the rains, cloud masses formed over them in giant tiers, which were tinted with golden hues at sunset. "Well can one believe in the Olympian mansions of the gods when gazing on the glorious cloud-cities which surround the dazzling pinnacles of those snow-clad ranges. And then in the mornings what a sight is there!—seas and lakes of white cloud sunk to sleep in the deep valleys, and awakening to life when the sun's warmth rouses them to fresh movement and to gradual climbing of the mountain sides."\* To the south were the plains of the Punjab with a great river flowing through them. In the foreground were the mountains of various shapes and colours softened by the fleecy clouds floating over them or nestling in the valleys below.

The land on which the present Simla is built, belonged to the Maharaja of Patiala and the Rana of Keonthal. In 1824 a number of British officers

\* Edward J. Buck, *Simla Past and Present*, Calcutta, 1904, p. 22.

and merchants, chiefly invalids in search of health built houses on this site. The land was rent-free, and the only condition imposed was that they should refrain from the slaughter of cows. In 1831, Simla was visited by Victor Jacquemont, the French botanist of the Museum of Natural History, Paris. He stayed with Captain Kennedy, the first Political Agent of the Hill States. Describing Simla he said it was "the resort of the rich, the idle, and the invalid. Each of the guests wished to have one also, and now there are upwards of sixty houses scattered over the peaks of the mountains or their declivities: thus a considerable village has risen as if by enchantment."

Kennedy introduced potato cultivation in Simla, and also that of European vegetables like cabbages and cauliflowers. Soon, there were numerous gardens which, apart from vegetables, grew beautiful parterres of wild flowers obtained by the mere trouble of transplanting them from the hill-sides.

The first Governor General who visited Simla was Lord Amherst. He came to Simla in 1827 and stayed with Kennedy. It was Amherst who said, "The Emperor of China and I govern half the human race, and yet we find time to break-fast." He was enchanted by the scenery and made Simla his summer retreat.

The discovery of Simla created a furious competition for summer leave among the civil and army officials posted at Calcutta which was then the Capital of India. The humid heat of Calcutta was enervating, and even other parts of the Indian plains were as hot as a furnace in the month of June. Great was the joy of those whose request for summer leave was granted. Off they went to Simla.

Approach to the Olympus was by no means easy. Ghaggar was a serious barrier in the rains and elephants were employed to ferry the travellers. The road to Simla from Kalka—the grand Hindustan Tibet road—was designed by Major Kennedy, but was only built in 1856. Luggage was carried by coolies on their heads or in bullock carts. On account of the narrowness of the road, there were many mishaps. Men rode horses, while women preferred the jampan, a sedan chair slung on poles carried by trotting coolies. Those who rode horses often had strange encounters on the narrow cart road.

In spite of the rigours of the journey, great was the joy of the white vacationers when they reached Simla. When the descent to the plains from Simla started in October equally great was their sorrow and dismay.

It was the age of glorious *sahibs* and resplendent *mem sahibs*. British imperialism in India was at the acme of its power and glory. The empire-builders, the civil and military officers were confident and aggressive, and had no doubts regarding the superiority of their civilization and culture as compared with the ancient culture of India.

By the middle of the 19th century, Simla acquired the title of the Capua of India. It was full of bright ladies and gay gentlemen whose main

preoccupation was attending balls, parties and picnics, and to chase the glowing hours with flying feet. For this state of affairs blame must be partly shared by the climate of Simla, in which women acquired the rosiest of complexions, and as a visitor observed, "The cheeks of the young ladies absolutely invited kisses." Quarrels, jealousies, and flirtations formed the staple conversation of the Simla society. The pioneer in this game was a beautiful Mrs James who enchanted Simla in 1839. She was a captain's wife "who looked like a star among all others, and was so lovely that she drove every other woman with any pretension to beauty quite distracted." She later acquired fame as Lola Montez and was the mistress of King Ludwig of Bavaria who made her a Countess and built a palace for her. Her intrigues and love affairs created sensation in London and Paris. She went to America in 1853 as an actress and later on, became a public lecturer on the 'Art of Beauty.' She died in New York in 1861 at the age of 38.

The scandals of Simla provided a grist to the mill of Rudyard Kipling who spent several months in the station in the eighties, and regaled the world with his *Plain Tales from the Hills*. In these tales we get glimpses of Mrs Hawksbees overlaid with calls and dressing and admiration, frivolous grass-widows and idle hill captains and *bow-wows*.

There were two favourite pastimes for the British residents in Simla. One was to climb the summit of 8,300-foot Jakhu Hill. Those with stout legs and sound lungs preferred it. At the top of the hill lived a *sadhu*, who was the guardian angel of the troops of brown rhesus monkeys. As he shouted "Aao! Aao!" they appeared in large numbers from all directions with their tails uplifted displaying their red posteriors. Visitors fed them with parched gram. Apart from feeding the monkeys, they were rewarded with the view of most glorious sunsets in the months of September and October. Even the River Sutlej and the foothills were visible wrapped in a golden haze. Those with less energy preferred to circumambulate around the Jakhu on foot, or on horse-back. It provided a pleasant one-hour walk through noble deodar forests and also opportunities for amorous encounters on horse-back.

The British officials who assembled at Simla in summer were not all a frivolous lot. There were serious-minded men among them, who planned the net-work of railways and canals which changed the face of India. Among them were men like Allan Octavian Hume and Sir William Hunter, distinguished members of the great Indian Civil Service. Hume built up a collection of 63,000 birds and 19,000 eggs in his residence, Rothney Castle. Many of these birds were new to science. He became a Theosophist under the influence of Madame Blavatsky. As Theosophy regards the taking of life as a sin he sent telegrams to his army of collectors all over India to shoot no more birds. He donated his collection of birds and eggs to the British Museum, London. Hume was also the first person to organize in 1870 the Department of Agriculture in the Government of India "to work out the

salvation of rural India.' In 1885, he founded the Indian National Congress. Sir William Hunter was a voracious reader, and a prolific writer. He wrote and edited the volumes of the Imperial Gazetteer, which are even today consulted by scholars.

By 1872 Simla had reached its full glory. A visitor observed : "The little town is now one of the capitals of the greatest empire in the world. Subject princes, mighty western nobles, and travellers from every country are seen in its narrow bazaars. Long lines of camels, and caravans of oxen carts, are unceasingly, for six months of every year, pouring into it the luxuries of Hindostan, and the magnificent comforts of Europe. A thousand beautiful villas look down upon it from the surrounding hills, and on the splendid road which lead from it in every direction may be seen, of a summer evening, a wonderful show of fashion and beauty—the *crème de la crème* of England in Asia."\*

The last Viceroy to visit Simla was Lord Wavell (1943–1947). Simla of 1947 was a mixture of the white middle class with the brown, which replaced the former in due course. The Kashmiri workers carrying heavy loads on their backs were ubiquitous. During summer they also found employment as wood-cutters. The Tibetan pedlars selling prayer-wheels and brass utensils were common and provided the tourists with excellent targets for photography. The scarlet-clad *chaprasis* wearing splendid gold-embroidered belts carrying office boxes, added colour to the scene. Aberigh Mackay was unnecessarily harsh when he described the *chaprasis* as "the mother-in-law of liars, the high priest of extortioners and receiver-general of bribes." British majors, sitting upright in rickshaws pulled by coolies, smoking pipes and furtively watching curvaceous blondes, could also be seen. Servants leading ponies ridden by *baba log* accompanied by *mem-sahibs* with eyes duly protected from glare by dark glasses were a common sight. On the Mall promenaded Punjabi beauties clad in saris of various colours and bearded Sardarjis accompanied by their salwar-clad Sardarnis. Watching paternally this cavalcade of humanity were the khaki-clad policemen with blue and red turbans and carrying long sticks.

In August 1947 India became independent, and Simla ceased to be the summer capital of the Government of India. However, it became the capital of the State Governments of Himachal Pradesh and the East Punjab. Many changes took place in the pattern and quality of life in Simla.

In May 1952, I was appointed Development Commissioner of Punjab and was posted at Simla. Long walks in the silent forests of cedars were something to be experienced. People talk about the cedars of Lebanon, but are they more graceful than the noble trees which cover the Jakhu Hill of Simla? The hill-sides near the old Viceregal Lodge are covered with

\* Quoted by Edward J. Buck from Chambers' Journal, 1872, in *Simla Past and Present*, Calcutta 1904, p. 185.

rhododendrons, whose red flowers are a sight never to be forgotten. During a walk in the cedar forest I happened to meet V. S. Suri, the newly-appointed Curator of the Punjab Museum. He informed me that the East Punjab Government's share of the exhibits of the Lahore Museum had been received from Pakistan and was on display in a church building close to the Scandal Point of Simla. Three major changes have taken place in Simla as a result of the departure of the British: the disappearance of liveried rickshaw pullers and scarlet-clad orderlies, and the appearance of shops selling *pans* and *pakorās* on the Mall, and the surplus church buildings. Christians, unlike other religious communities, are more sensible, and they have been allowing secular use of their churches by de-sanctifying them. Obviously, the Punjab Museum has been the beneficiary of such a gesture. The news of the arrival of Kangra paintings and Gandhara sculptures was most welcome, and I promised to see them the next day.

The Mall Road of Simla is a smiling river of life in the evenings. Here, you get a cross-section of the people of the Punjab and Himachal Pradesh, from the high ranges of the Himalayas to the desert of Hissar. That group of men and women with broad faces, peep hole eyes, high cheek-bones and ruddy cheeks are Kanauras from the border area close to Tibet. They come from the valleys immediately under the snowy range where grapes, strawberries, walnuts and peaches grow in abundance. Their women are fair and gaily dressed. Their pretty faces and merry laughter reflect the peace and plenty of the valleys from which they come. Who are these women chirping like sparrows, with orange kerchiefs tied around their heads like pirates, wearing necklaces of golden beads, and draped in velvet waistcoats? How coquettish they look in their finery! They are from Mahasu, and can be called the hill women *par excellence* of Himachal. These men, with skull caps, and clothes not washed since they were sewn, carrying heavy loads on their backs are the coolies from Kashmir, who come to Simla during summer.

The Scandal Point is the confluence of three rivers of humanity. Here we see batches of vivacious Punjabi girls in all stages of modernity. Some are wearing the traditional *salwar* and *kameez* in all imaginable shades of the seven colours of the spectrum; some are wearing saris, filmy and gauzy which provide glimpses of the seductive parts of their anatomy. The bolder ones are more outrageously dressed in narrow trousers and skirts, and have got rid of their pig-tails. From a distance, it sometimes becomes difficult to distinguish them from boys. Watching these tempting brunettes is a motley crowd. That is why the confluence has acquired the name of Scandal Point. At a remote end there is a group of Punjabi Hindu merchants wearing white turbans buttoned-up coats with closed collars, and clumsy pyjamas. Their faces are pinched and heavily wrinkled; their noses are like beaks of eagles, and from their wild gesticulations one could presume they are discussing some controversial problem. Nearby is a group of Sikh

peasants wearing blue turbans with bright quoits around them, and carrying swords—weapons which appear so unnecessary in these peaceful hills. Reclining against the wires of the railing are groups of young men, in bright sports shirts and narrow trousers carrying transistors, watching the brunettes, and announcing their judgements on their victims in loud tones.

Clearing past the crowd of ogling teddy boys, I reached the Museum. At the entrance were the Gandhara images; then there was a room-ful of musical instruments and crafts. Passing through the array of stringed instruments, I entered a room which contained some of the Kangra paintings, which I had seen in my student days. I was delighted to renew acquaintance with the *nāyikās* of Kangra. It appeared almost like a reunion.

## Sacred Deodars, Water Babies and Devatas

**T**HE BEAUTY OF Mashobra and Naldera is well known and one day I decided to explore them. I sent my car to the tunnel near Sanjauli and decided to walk through the deodar forest below the convent which is not far from Ellerslie, the Secretariat of the Punjab Government. This part of Simla has escaped desecration by cars and jeeps and still remains a pedestrian's paradise. The trunks of deodars were covered with ferns and mosses and these graceful trees looked like cathedrals. Silence prevails in the forest and you could almost hear your heart-beats. As you emerge from the forest, the hills opposite, brown and barren, glare at you. They all face south, and their barrenness is explained by intense insolation. In contrast, their north-facing slopes are cool and well-wooded. This phenomenon you will see all over the Himalayas.

We emerged near the Sanjauli bazaar and motored through this uninteresting suburb of Simla. Beyond are many places of interest. To the right is Kufri, now partly covered with potatoes and a dense forest of deodars. To the left is the road to Mashobra. After passing through a forest of *Pinus excelsa*, the blue pine, we saw a number of villas hidden in thick forests of pines and deodars. Next, we passed by the village of Deothi which has an interesting wooden temple, which looked picturesque against the background of deodars. We emerged on a plateau, to the right of which is the village of Mashobra. In spite of intensive cultivation, the number of trees left uncut is large and their crowns shone under the light of the rising sun. Carefully terraced fields, in which potatoes grew, spoke of the industry of the people. These terraces were built by sifting stones and piling them on the embankments, and represent the toil of many generations.

Some of the terraces are irrigated by tiny channels, fed by springs. Most of the farm work with the exception of ploughing is done by women. The whole day they are busy cutting grass and carrying home bundles of fuel. During the harvest seasons they are exceedingly busy. There are no creches



and baby-sitters to take charge of their babies. After lulling them to sleep, they place them in a corner of the field, and arrange a tiny stream of water to fall on their heads by a piece of bamboo. Sometimes a row of babies may be seen fast asleep, with water pattering over their heads. According to the belief of the hill people this Spartan practice makes their children strong and healthy.

Hill fairs are known for their gaiety and colourfulness. However, few can compare with the Sipi fair in the grandeur of its setting. We slowly descended from the level of the untidy Mashobra bazaar to a cup-shaped valley shaded by ancient deodars. The centre of attraction were hillmen wearing long choghas and turbans, holding unsheathed swords, and dancing to the accompaniment of the music of *narsinghas* and drums. More interesting than even the dancers were the women sitting on the slope of a hill watching them. Many of them were distinctly pretty. Their heads were covered with handkerchiefs of various colours, though there was a distinct preference for orange, green and red. Their necks were loaded with necklaces of silver rupees and multi-coloured beads. Their faces were decorated with large nose-rings, and their arms were covered with glass bangles. An incessant chirping was going on which was drowned by the noise of the drums. Watching the women was a throng of men, some of whom had come on business. The bachelors come to this fair in search of brides, and many marriage alliances are contracted during the fair. There were numerous shops, selling *laddus* and *jalebies*, the popular Indian sweets, necklaces of glass beads, silver ornaments, toys and cloth. People derive much pleasure in gazing at each other, and male eyes are always in search of beautiful women. In fact, this is the *raison d'être* of fairs and festivals. It was with great reluctance that we left the fair.

On a plateau near the bazaar, a *devata* accompanied by an orchestra of drums and *narsinghas* was camping. He was resting in a palanquin coated with silver foil. The masks of the *devata* were embossed in front and on the sides, and were surrounded by an elaborate necklace of silver coins, Orange marigolds provided a touch of colour. The entire structure was capped by a silver umbrella. At the four corners were smaller silver umbrellas. The priest had long jet-black hair falling on the shoulders. He was about forty, and his dark glowing eyes were inward-looking. Altogether, he looked a magnetic figure who could hypnotize the hill people. A man came with folded hands and placed a rupee in front of the *devata*. He asked the priest to tell him when his son, a boy of six, who had fallen seriously ill, would recover. An attendant lighted incense, and the priest started shaking his head. He gibbered and his eyes were staring in front, as if he were seeing a vision. The audience said, "He is now in communion with the *devata*." The priest shouted that the boy would recover in a week, but the supplicant should offer a goat to the *devata*. An attendant came and asked me if I had any question to ask. I replied that I had none to ask, and decided to move on.

I reached Coutt's orchard which is now a Regional Fruit Research Station, in half an hour. In this garden grow apples of many varieties including some from Siberia. I introduced Sakuras, the flowering cherries from Japan in this garden in 1959, and from here they were distributed to a number of travellers' rest houses. From a corner of the garden, a splendid view of the hill ranges could be had. There they are spread out before you, range after range, in many shades of purple, blue and green covered with forests of pines, and dotted with apple gardens and houses. The setting sun gilded the sky, and breathed poetry over the scene. The air was fresh and bracing. This is a memorable place in the Himalayas and its memory haunts me whenever I watch a sunset.

Six miles from the garden is Naldera, another spot of great natural beauty. During the British rule, it was regarded as 'an ideal retreat' from the 'despotism of the despatch boxes.' Even Viceroys were not immune to this despotism. That is why Naldera became the favourite camping ground of Curzon, the patron deity of archaeologists and historians, who organized the Archaeological Department and saved the ancient monuments of India from vandals, mainly Indians, at that time. Here, nature and man have combined their efforts to create a scene of unique beauty. Undulating mounds are shaded by giant deodars and in a corner is a hill-temple painted green, blending with the surroundings. The ground is turfed for the benefit of golfers. Across the gorge are seen mountains, grand and awe-inspiring!

Deodars are considered sacred trees by the hill people, and the ancient ones are regarded as abode of *devatas* or gods. Pieces of cloth are tied to the branches of trees as offerings, and as they flutter in the breeze, one is reminded of the spirit world which the fertile imagination of the hill people has created. This belief has, however, ensured the protection of these tree giants.

The following legend about a mulberry-tree which became the abode of the soul of a merchant was recorded from the village of Naldera by Edward Buck:

"Far away in one of the valleys near Simla, lies a little village, where once lived a good man who had his home beside a field, in which grew a beautiful mulberry-tree. A *mela* (festival) was regularly held beneath its shade, and the poor carried away basket-loads of its fruit, so that it came to be an annual meeting place. The fame of it reached a certain raja who had rented out the land, and one day he came with all his retinue to see it. 'There is no such tree in the royal gardens,' said the Grand Wazir. 'It is not meet that a subject should possess what the raja hath not,' added the Prime Minister. The Raja did not utter a word, for his heart was filled with envy; and that night before he went to sleep he gave orders that on a certain day at early dawn, before anybody was astir, a party of armed men should take their axes to the village and cut down the mulberry tree. But ill dreams disturbed the Raja's rest, and during the night a strange man appeared to him and said, 'O King live for ever! I am the spirit of a

*bania* (merchant) who died in yonder village many years ago. During my life time I defrauded the people. I gave them short measure and adulterated their food. When I died, therefore, and passed into the land of spirits, the gods who are just, O king, decreed that I should restore all I had stolen. My soul, therefore, entered a mulberry-tree, where, year after year, the people may gather fruit and regain their losses. In one year more they will be repaid to the last cowrie; but you mean to destroy the tree and drive away my soul I know not whither; therefore have I come to plead with you to spare it this once; for, when the year is past it will die of itself, and my soul return in peace to the land of shadows.' So the Raja listened, and the strange man went away. For one year more the people sat under the mulberry tree as of yore; the next year it died!"\* Even now the hill people believe that spirits reside in the trees, particularly the deodars, pippals and banyans, and none would cut them.

As I left Naldera, I came across a strange wooden sculpture, which could pass off as a master-piece of contemporary sculpture. A stump of a dead tree was moulded into the shape of a snake's head. The eyes and the mouth were painted with lamp-black. From a distance, it looked like a python. It was tied to a tree with a rope and in front was an iron trident. This strange representation of a snake was a reminder that serpent worship is even now a reality in the hills, and a large number of people still remain immune to the advances in science.

I decided to visit the temple of Mahu Nag, about a mile from Naldera. I descended to the level of the village and in a corner was the temple. The temple building is rectangular and its lower part consists of alternating layers of stones and timber. The roof is of timber, covered with slates. The entrance door with its strange carvings reminded me of pre-Columban Mexican sculpture. At the sides are the figures of the *dwarपालas* or guardians of the gate. The door is carved in a strange manner and the figures show barbaric vigour. The figures are encrusted with metal discs, the offerings of devotees. I have as yet not exhausted my account of the artistic beauty of this temple. Further exploration revealed carved human figures on the side walls. They had a serene expression and calm beauty. The primitive beauty of these carvings has a remote resemblance to African wood sculpture. This does not, however, imply any genetic relationship, and appears more a case of parallelism in artistic endeavour.

The god dwells on the first floor which is reached by climbing a notched wooden plank. The image of the god is in a small casket enclosed in a box. No one has seen the god—not even the priests. Nobody dares set his eyes on Him, they say due to fear of being struck blind. The room in which he lies has one window-like opening on the wooden doors on which there are beautiful carvings of goddess Durga. On one of the sides of the roof of the *mandap*

\* Edward J. Buck, *Simla, Past and Present*, Calcutta, 1904, p. 188, 189.

near the temple, there is a carved panel depicting the marriage procession of Shiva and Parvati.

Mahu Nag is said to have crossed the river Sutlej in response to the piteous appeals of his devotees who had settled in their new home on the other side of the river, and were harassed by the Malveis, the local tribe. They prayed to Mahu Nag to rescue them. The god routed the Malveis, and deprived them of this fertile land in Kogee, and bestowed it on his devotees.

The god's crossing the Sutlej river had been inferred from a story current about the discovery of his image near Naldera. It is said that cowherd boys grazed their cattle in the forest close to Naldera where at present are the golf links. They found that at a particular spot the cows would yield milk. When they returned home, their parents scolded them for their carelessness. The boys protested and showed them the spot where the cows yielded their milk. What they saw amazed them, and when they dug that spot they discovered an image made up of seven metals. Their simple faith saw in the image their own god Raja Karan Mahu Nag. The image was installed in their village Kogee, which is at a stone's throw from the golf grounds in the khud. Twice a year the god is brought to the golf grounds where a temple has been built and a big fair is held. People from far and near flock to the temple and dance with a rhythmic lilt inspired by Mahu Nag. The drummers and *shahnai* players that accompany the dance, play a special kind of music known as *Dev Baja*, which arouses the psyche of the listeners. The atmosphere is so surcharged with emotions that even spectators join the dance. It is related that once an English girl who came to the fair was so affected that she began to dance and would not stop. The devotees thought that she was possessed by Mahu Nag. Her friends and relatives became worried and prayed to the god to restore her senses, and she recovered.

Mahu Nag is also known as Monal or Nal, a name which was given to him by the devotees because of the pure beauty and splendour that the Himalayan blue pheasant has. Naldera means the *dera* or abode of god Nal.

Mahu Nag is known to love dance and the best native offering is to dance to him. His love for dancing is illustrated by the story of a drummer who was returning home after attending wedding festivities in a neighbouring village. It was twilight when he was passing through a jungle. He saw a beautiful pheasant which he thought would be nice for a meal. He took out his catapult and aimed at the bird. The bird became enormous in size and thus spoke, "Did you take me for a bird? Come let us dance; play on your drum." People say that when god Mahu Nag danced, the entire universe danced. The drummer danced and danced and lost all consciousness. The fields, trees, rocks and the god's parasol whirled and whirled in dance.

There are many temples of *nags* and *devis* scattered all over Himachal Pradesh. Numerous legends are connected with them. All of them are picturesquely located, in forest glens, mountain peaks or shelves of rocks. The silver masks of the gods and goddesses are in different designs, showing

faces with benign expressions. I often felt that a photographic record of these temples, *devis* and *devatas* would be of great interest from the point of view of art history. If someone would undertake this work, it would be a source of great pleasure and would also add to our knowledge. It would also provide an opportunity for wandering in the hills with an objective. A travel of this nature is interesting and one forgets the minor inconveniences which every traveller encounters. I often felt that had I been younger or had the leisure, I would have done it. Whoever undertakes it, would find it fascinating as well as rewarding.

## Apple Orchards, Kulu Paintings and Pheasants

**F**ROM SIMLA I decided to visit the Kulu Valley. Leaving Simla early in the morning in early October, my first halt was at the rest house at Theog. It commands a splendid view of the mountains which appear like waves in a ruffled ocean. The only resident was a Japanese, sitting in the verandah enjoying the view of the mountains. I decided not to disturb him, and pushed on to Narkanda. On the way, I passed by the village of Mattiana which has a school and a dak bungalow. The mountains there were treeless, and the landscape, bleak.

On a rocky shelf was a temple on which a number of flags were flying. On one side was seated a solitary worshipper with folded hands, lost in meditation. I wondered what problem troubled his soul. These rough way-side shrines are a reminder of that Unseen Power which we all feel, whether we are biologists, nuclear physicists, or ordinary men of the world. In the rugged grandeur of the mountains our consciousness of the Great Power which is behind all phenomena and the mystery of life, is sharpened. We feel the loneliness of the spirit of man in the great cosmos. In such moments of solitude, we become conscious of the Great Power which keeps the planets in their orbits in their journey in the vastness of space. It is the same Power which has guided the evolution of life from its lowly origins as protozoa and algae about two hundred crores of years ago, and raised them to the dignity of man, the beauty of flowering trees and the abundance of cereal plants. We see that Power in lovers when they gaze into each other's eyes, and we call it Love. It is also in the mother when she looks tenderly at her child. It is in us all the time and makes us distinguish the right from the wrong. We give it the name of conscience, and it speaks to us in gentle whispers to keep us on the right path. It is what Kant called "the moral law within". People of religion have given it various names. When the Hindu rings the bell in his temple, he is paying homage to that Power. The Christian in his church

prays and lights candles in honour of the same Power. The muezzin, when he calls the faithful to the prayer, repeats Its name. It is the same Power of which we were reminded by this rugged temple perched on the rock in the Himalayas. The fluttering of the flags on it are the prayers of wayfarers, which are wafted in the serene atmosphere of the mountains.

The sight of the tall firs reminded us that we were nearing the pass of Narkanda. The mountain passes, sometimes unfold vistas of sublime beauty. In the valley in front was spread a panorama of great majesty! In the background was a crescent of snow-covered mountains, and in the valley below was a forest of the spruce fir, '*Abies smithiana*. The spruce firs were very ancient, possibly five hundred years old and their tops soared into the sky like the spires of Gothic cathedrals. A few years later I found that this noble forest which Nature had nurtured over the centuries had been cut, thus depriving the visitors of a magnificent sight.

Opposite Narkanda lay Kotgarh, the home of apples. Here Samuel Stokes, an American from Pennsylvania, settled in 1912. He married a hillwoman, became a Hindu, and adopted the name of Satyanand. Thus he closely identified himself with the hill people and dedicated himself to their service. He was touched by the poverty of the hill people and was rightly disgusted with the indifference and apathy of the British rulers. These were the early years of the Independence movement. He became a follower of Mahatma Gandhi, joined the Congress and courted imprisonment. His most useful discovery was that apples could grow at Kotgarh. He introduced the red and golden delicious apples from the United States of America in Kotgarh. These varieties are now grown on a large acreage and have alleviated the poverty of this area. I was glad to meet his son Lal Chand Stokes, who is a keen horticulturist. On the hill-top at Kotgarh is a graceful temple built in the memory of his father who not only gave a new crop to the farmers of Himachal Pradesh, but also reared a talented family, whose members are playing a key role in the development of the hill area. This also proves that the future of the world lies not in racism and hatred, but in the mingling of races. If early experiments in miscegenation in India were unfortunate, it was due to the fact that the Britishers who married Indian women had access only to women of low castes like sweepers and *dhobis*. Where people of the same level of intelligence and education married, children were often bright and vigorous.

After resting in the travellers' bungalow at Narkanda for the night, I prepared for the journey to Kulu. With great difficulty I discovered a coolie to carry my bedding and hired a pony for my ride. By noon I reached Kumarsain, capital of a small hill state and now a tehsil. It is a pleasant little town, with the Raja's palace in the centre. I was tired and famished. The Naib Tehsildar provided me with a meal, which I greatly enjoyed. No doubt hunger is the best sauce! So far arts and manufactures are concerned, *the Gazetteer* categorically states, "There are no arts and

manufactures." This was confirmed, as I could not find any collection of paintings with the Raja's family at Kumarsain.

From Kumarsain, the journey was down-hill and in three hours I reached Luri and crossed the Sutlej by a suspension bridge. While crossing the river I was reminded of the ritual of *bedha* which was practised at Nirmand in the 19th century. Nirmand is only a few miles from Luri on the right side of the river, and is associated with Parasurama. An English woman, Mrs. Murray-Aynsley who passed through this area thus described *bedha*: "Rather less than half-way between Nirth and Rampore on the right bank of the river, and consequently in Kûlu and in British territory, here only to be approached by a rope bridge, is a village called Nirmand amongst the people of which a curious custom prevails; every 15 or 20 years (it occurred last in 1879 or 1880) a low-caste man is chosen to make the passage across the river in a peculiar manner. He must go through a course of fasting and religious exercises for some time beforehand; and on the day appointed, in the presence of a vast number of people assembled to witness the feat, the man, with heavy sand bags tied to his legs to weight him, is placed in a kind of a sling, so arranged as to run freely up and down a slackish rope, which is stretched across the Sutlej, each end of this rope being attached to a high post. When all is ready, the performer is let go; he slides down the incline with sufficient velocity to carry him up the other side; but so great is the friction, that I was told the rope sometimes catches fire, and it occasionally breaks, in both which cases the man perishes: nothing can save him, for the current is very rapid, and he is heavily weighted. Should he reach the opposite bank in safety, he and his family are thence-forward considered most holy persons; they need never work for their livelihood, and are entitled to receive a fixed amount of food from the inhabitants of certain villages."\*

From Luri a climb started. About five hundred feet from the level of the river, I found rows of pebbles neatly embedded in an exposure made by the workers who constructed the road. It was clearly a river deposit, and showed how the bed of the river had gone down in the course of thousands of years. This is a common sight in the Himalayas and illustrates the erosive action of rivers and also the uplift of the mountains. The Himalayas, being a young mountain system, are still rising.

After a pleasant ride of a few miles, I reached the rest house at Ani in Outer Saraj. The Saraj tehsil is divided into two halves by a spur of the Sri-kand Dhar, a mountain range 10,000 to 18,000 feet high. This mountain range has two main passes, the Jalori and the Bashleo. The Beas side of the spur is known as the Inner Saraj and the Sutlej side as the Outer Saraj. At Ani, I met Raja Raghubir Singh of Shangri, a scion of the Rajas of Kulu.

\* Mrs J.C. Murray-Aynsley, *An Account of a Three Months' Tour from Simla through Bussahir, Kunowar and Spiti, to Lahoul, Calcutta, 1882*, pp. 213-215.



He sent me some vegetables, which were most welcome. In the evening he came to see me. A well-built man, wearing Jodhpur breeches, he was a keen *shikari*. He showed interest in apple cultivation. Apples grew on some of the mountains above 4,000 feet, but due to the lack of a pucca road they could not be transported to the plains. In the valley below Ani, I saw zinnias growing wild. Their flowers were smaller than those in cultivation. I felt they must have escaped from some garden. The Raja told me that he scattered the seed in the valley some years ago and since then they grew wild.

With Raghbir Singh I discovered a whole series of paintings of the *Ramayana* in the primitive Kulu style. This is an important discovery in Pahari painting, and I was thrilled. I published three paintings out of this series in my book on *Basohli Painting*. There was one painting which was particularly attractive. Rama and Lakshmana are seated on a mountain against the background of a star-spangled dark night. They are bewailing the loss of Sita who has been taken away by Ravana. This painting seemed to me a symbol of the sorrow of man, and when I am alone it often appears before my eyes. I offered the Raja a sum of fifteen thousand rupees for the entire set for the Punjab Museum. However, he preferred to wait and later on I learnt that they had been purchased by Naulakha, a dealer from Calcutta, who paid ready cash. Fortunately, some of these paintings were purchased from the dealer by the National Museum, New Delhi, and thus, they are not all lost to India.

Next morning I climbed the Jalori Pass which is 10,286 feet above sea-level. From the top of the Pass I had a splendid view of the snow-covered mountains of Kulu and Lahaul. A cloudless blue sky overhead, and all around an atmosphere so clear and pure that the long line of far-off snows stood out white and sharp in brilliant definition. Above all there was perfect stillness: not a sound could be heard. I stood a long time listening to this intense stillness.

On the way I met Gaddi shepherds, driving their flocks to the pastures below the pass. I asked a shepherd, who was carrying a lamb and driving a flock of these innocent creatures, to pose for a photo and to smile. He replied that he had lost his front teeth, and as such, he found difficulty in complying with my request. Nevertheless, I got a splendid photo.

The next halt was at Khanag, a bungalow situated in a dense forest of oaks and cedars. Unlike pine forests, there is always a thick undergrowth of shrubs in oak forests, which provides shelter to birds. I saw moonal pheasants here for the first time. While the female is drab, the male is gloriously plumed. As the male bird darts through the trees, its metallic feathers shine. The feathers in its crest are eagerly sought by the dancers of Outer Saraj, who wear them on their black caps, on the occasion of the Dussehra festival. Apart from moonals, other Himalayan pheasants such as the kalij and chakor are also common. Among the wild animals, bharal, barking deer, musk deer, black and brown bear and panther are found in these forests.

On a rock I saw two women in a jolly mood. They were singing a folk song, and their plaintive voices echoed in the valley in a strange manner. I stood for a while listening to their song. Their voices were soft, and there was great charm in their unconscious frankness. Their olive throats were well set off by the strings of coral. When they saw my coolie with the bedding, they stopped singing and fled.

The bungalow at Shoja at 8,500 feet, my next halt, was just delightful. There is a splendid deodar forest here and the glades are covered with carpets of the purple *Iris nepalensis*. The yellow-green orchid *Liparis paradoxa*, blue geraniums and yellow anemones are also abundant.

The next bungalow at Jibi at 6,100 feet was only five miles away. It enjoys a picturesque location on a knoll, above a stream. Here were vast pine-woods sweeping down the steep mountain side into the torrent foaming below. I decided to walk another five miles to Banjar which is at a lower altitude. Here, a proprietor of a way-side shop, a Sud, prepared my lunch. It consisted of fried *puris* and curried potatoes and tasted excellent. When the night fell, I sat in the verandah admiring the stars which sparkled in all their brilliance in the dark sky.

My destination was the bungalow at Aut or Out, as it is pronounced, built near the confluence of the Sainj and the Beas. At this place, motor transport was available. When I reached it, I gave a feast of *jalebies* to my coolie who had carried my bedding all the way from Narkanda and had also served as a cook. I asked him to eat as many as he liked, and when he was satiated, I gave him his wages and a tip of ten rupees. He left for his village in a happy mood. I still recollect his happy face, full of gratitude, as he sat below the road-sign post which indicated that I was 104 miles from Simla.



kulu



## The Valley of Gods

**I**HAD HEARD GLOWING accounts of the Kulu Valley from forest officers. They described it as a valley of stately cedars, apple orchards, and a cheerful people who love dance, music, and rice beer. They also described it as the valley of gods and goddesses, who in spite of their divinity do not spurn human frailties. Gods of the Himalayas live in places difficult of access, and the gods of the Kulu Valley are no exception to the rule.

It was 1953, in the month of October, when the sky was blue and there was a nip in the air, when I decided to pay a visit to Kulu. Leaving Mandi early in the morning we crossed the Beas by a suspension bridge near Pandoh. The river here passes through an awesome gorge with steep and precipitous mountains on both sides. The road is like a narrow ribbon cut out of granite, with projecting over-hanging rocks in some places. During the rains large stones are loosened, and roll down the mountain side. As our car cleared the narrow corners, over tumbled shale, with the boiling torrent of the river deep down on one side, and naked rocks on the other, my heart leapt to my mouth. I felt a strong urge to leave the car and walk the rest of the journey to Kulu. I realized why the ancient Hindus gave the name of *Kulantapith* or the end of the habitable world, to Kulu.

We halted at Larji, where the Sainj mingles its cobalt blue water with the turquoise grey of the Beas. The grandeur of the mountains which flank the river is over-whelming. It is here that the bridle road from Simla via Narkanda and Jalori pass joins the road from Mandi to Kulu.

"Why do they call Kulu, the valley of gods?" asked Archer.

"Wait till we reach Kulu. Tomorrow is the Dussehra festival, and you will find the answer to your question," I replied.

We next halted at Bajaura. Near the side of the road is the temple of Basheshwar Mahadeo. It is the most ancient temple in the Kulu Valley, and on stylistic grounds it can be dated 12th century. The background of the river and the mountains lends it great dignity. The country-side widens, and the river, no longer confined to a gorge, fans out, gently

murmuring over stones and pebbles. On the islands in the river bed are alders, which give a definite character to the Kulu Valley. As one cannot think of the Kashmir Valley without chenars and poplars, so is the landscape of the Kulu Valley associated with alders and cedars. The cedar forest of Manali with its noble trees, some over a millenium old, is a place of pilgrimage for tree lovers.

There are plateaus on both sides of the river dotted with apple orchards and maize crop. Admiring the alders, and *kao* olives, we reached Sultanpur, another name for Kulu. We stayed in the forest rest house overlooking the plain fringed by cedars, where Dussehra is held. Sprawling over the plain was a large crowd of hill men and women. Bands of musicians beating kettle drums and cymbals, blowing trumpets and *narsinghas* were marching in the form of a procession towards the plain. In the centre of the procession was a sedan chair decorated with marigolds on which silver masks of the gods were fastened.

On one of the *raths*, as the sedan chairs are called, was a silver mask with the smiling face of a girl.

"Who is this goddess?" I asked the priest.

"She is Garga Durga of Gosaini. She is a rain-goddess, and we pray to her for rain when there is a drought."

"She has a very pretty face," I remarked.

"She was the daughter of a Thakur of Dethua in Kothi Kot," the priest replied. She was the loveliest girl in the valley. A mason of Bandal did some good work for the Thakur, who was so pleased that he promised the mason all that he desired. The mason claimed the maiden, and was allowed to take her away. Duty-bound, she accompanied him but found nothing congenial in the low-bred mason. Disappointed and unhappy as she sat by the river Tirthan, the river drew her down into its cool depth, and she turned into a *devi*."

"Suppose it does not rain."

"Then we confine the goddess in a dark cell."

"Are there more rain goddesses like her in the Valley?"

"Hurma of Dhungri, Phungni, and Jogni Bijori are the other rain goddesses. The most powerful among these is Hurma, whose temple is in the cedar forest at Manali. Unlike other goddesses she has the privilege of reaching late at the Dussehra. She will arrive here tomorrow," the priest replied.

In the evening we saw the priests taking their gods and goddesses for an evening stroll. They were oscillating the *raths*. Kulu people treat their deities like superior human beings. They are awakened in the morning, taken out for a walk and bathed. They are even supplied with twigs for use as tooth-brushes, and are regularly fed. They are also made to embrace each other, and are danced up and down on the village green. The gods accompanied by their followers visit neighbouring villages. These visits are

a source of social intercourse among the people of Kulu, and promote friendly feelings among them. Their biggest festival is the Dussehra when 360 gods and goddesses assemble at Sultanpur to pay homage to Raghunathji or Rama who is now the chief god of the valley.

The gods, or *deotas* as they are called, own considerable landed property and from its income their priests and retainers including drummers and musicians are fed. Due to the recent land reforms even *deotas* have been deprived of their land, which now belongs to their tenants. This has had an adverse effect on the Dussehra festival, and the number of visiting gods and goddesses has seriously dwindled. There is every danger that this most colourful festival of the Himalayas might come to an end, unless other means are devised to tempt the attendants of the *deotas* to the fair.

Next morning I received a strange and unexpected visitor at the forest rest house. The chowkidar announced the arrival of the Nono of Spiti who was accompanied by his court clerk, a bright-looking Lahauli young man who also acted as his interpreter. The Nono, clad in a crimson-coloured robe, wore a peaked fur cap with flaps and had a rosary in his left hand. His big broad face, high cheek bones, slit-like eyes, bristling moustache and scanty beard reminded me of the Tibetan Lamas I had seen in Una as a school boy. I remember we used to hide under a masonry bridge from fear when the lamas passed. I asked them to sit on chairs which were in front of me. The Lahauli thus began the conversation:

"Nono Sahib has come to Kulu for judicial training. He has been here for the last one month. He says he finds the heat of Kulu unbearable. He requests that his period of training be curtailed."

"Tell Nono Sahib, that he should thank his stars that he was not called to Jullundur in the plains for his training. If he is uncomfortable here in the hills, how would he feel if he is moved on to Jullundur."

There was some truth in the complaint of Nono Sahib. People from high altitudes seldom feel happy when they descend below 8,000 feet. Apart from the heat of Kulu, I sensed that the Nono who was accustomed to his own rough and ready methods of administering justice, found the Indian Penal Code and the Evidence Act far too complicated, uncongenial and unnecessary in his Spiti environment.

"How does Nono Sahib conduct his cases in Spiti?" I asked the Lahauli.

"When there is a quarrel among two parties, Nono Sahib gives an opportunity to the complainant to invite him along with me, for a dinner at which rice beer is served. After some days the defendant gives a feast to him. The process goes on till they are tired and they reach a compromise!"

On hearing this, I felt how unnecessary it was to foist the Penal Code and the Evidence Act on such people. I promised to shorten the training period of Nono Sahib, so that he could return to Spiti early, and resume his wining and dining methods of administering justice to his people.

This incident also reminded me how unjust Macaulay had been to



rural India. He converted simple people, who were accustomed to compromises of their disputes by social pressure of the village community, into liars and criminals. He let loose on them a predatory horde of lawyers who earned their livelihood by promoting quarrels, and fabricating evidence. Rural India has still to recover from the ravages of Macaulay. Sleeman who was the British Resident at the court of Wajid Ali Shah, the last King of Oudh, toured through the State in 1849. He found that the peasantry was oppressed by the rent collectors of the Nawab and the robber barons. When he ascertained the reaction of some of them who had had taste of British justice in the courts of Calcutta, to the possibility of their coming under British rule, he received the following reply:

"Your courts of justice (*adawlut*s) are the things we most dread; and we are glad to escape from them as soon as we can, in spite of all the evils we are exposed to on our return to the place of our birth... The wrong-doer often escapes, and the sufferer is as often punished. The truth is seldom told in these courts. There they think of nothing but the number of witnesses, as if they were all alike; here, we see to the quality. When a man suffers wrong, the wrong-doer is summoned before the elders, or the most respectable men of his village or clan; and if he denies the charge and refuses redress, he is told to bathe, put his hand upon the peepul-tree and declare aloud his innocence. If he refuses, he is commanded to restore what he has taken, or make suitable reparation for the injury he has done; and if he refuses to do this, he is punished by the odium of all, and his life becomes miserable. A man dare not put his hand upon that sacred tree and deny the truth—the gods sit in it and know all things; and the offender dreads their vengeance."

This was also my experience as a Magistrate in Oudh. While a witness told blatant lies on taking the customary oath of the court, he dare not do so, if he held the tail of a cow, or a vessel containing water from the Ganges.

Sensible Englishmen who felt bored with the rulings of High Courts, sometimes devised shortcuts to justice. I am reminded of an English Deputy Commissioner of Fyzabad in the twenties of this century who enjoyed the sport of hurling bulky volumes of Law Reporters at the lawyers. During summer, he used to call the litigants to his residence, and made them climb the roof. At 11.00 a.m. the first call was made for those who had compromised. Another call was made at 12 o'clock. By 1 p.m. nearly all used to compromise, and return home happily.

After the departure of the Nono and his court clerk, came the young Raja of Kulu. He brought two illustrated Hindi manuscripts with him, one illustrating the *Bhagavata Purana* and the other the love story of Madhava and Malati. The colophon showed that both these were painted during the reign of Raja Pritam Singh at Raghunathpur. This was the name of Kulu in the 18th and early 19th centuries. I asked him if there were any wall paintings in his old palace. He professed ignorance. His reply did not dis-

courage me as I knew that the Rajas are not observant enough. I decided to make a personal exploration. The palace is situated in a lane close to the bazaar. The room at the entrance had large windows with blue, red, and green glass panes. On the walls were some paintings in Kangra style painted in the close of the 19th century. Then came a courtyard with a small room in a dark corner. Here I found the most interesting mural I had yet seen in the Punjab Himalayas. It showed the panorama of life in the hills in early 19th century; sadhus, beggars, hill men and women, shepherds, husbandsmen, Rajas and their wives, and the entire Hindu pantheon adoring the *devi*. On my suggestion, it was copied by Jagdish Mittal, an artist from Hyderabad, who was commissioned by the Lalit Kala Akademi of New Delhi. Later on it was removed to the National Museum at New Delhi, where it is on display.

The sound of the kettle-drums and the braying of *narsinghas* filled the air. It was an invitation to the festival and we decided to roam among the people of Kulu. The great plain of Dhalpur was full of hill people. The Dussehra festival was at its height. There is nothing so delightful as the fairs and festivals of the Himalayas. A bright group of women was seated on the steps built on the hill-side watching the sword dance of the men from Saraj. With crimson blue green and orange kerchiefs tied around their heads the women looked like flowers decorating the hill. They were draped in black and white chess-board pattern blankets, pinned at the bosom with a silver pin, and gathered in by a sash at the waist, gracefully displaying the lines of the figure. Their necks were loaded with necklaces of Victorian silver coins. Some were wearing garlands of marigold, narcissus and corn flower. The young ones among them had clear golden complexion, sparkling eyes, and mild and gentle expression.

Watching the women and the dance was a large crowd of men, mostly from the plains, including officials of the Punjab Government. At this time of the year, the senior officials turn up to inspect the tehsil, the police station and the schools of Kulu. Under a canopy, rows of chairs were laid on which were seated the Punjab officials in strict order of seniority, watching the dance of Sarajis. The dancers wore white woollen tunics girt at the waist with a sash, tight woollen trousers, and black round caps decorated with crest of the moonal pheasant. The presence of so many officials no doubt destroyed the charm of the dance, which lost its spontaneity and appeared more like a command performance.

The novelty of the dance soon wore off. We felt bored and decided to explore the different aspects of the festival. After clearing past the palanquins of gods and goddesses, we saw a gay crowd in a corner of the plain. On the merry-go-rounds were young Kulu women waving handkerchiefs. When we saw an old hag carrying on some delicate negotiations with a motor driver from Mandi, we realized that these were no ordinary village women.

Women have a dominant place in the rural society of the Kulu Valley.

They choose their own husbands unlike the women of the plains. About their morals, thus says the Gazetteer: "Chastity, in short, if considered as a virtue at all, is by no means considered a duty. Widows and even unmarried women who have not been given away in marriage in their youth by their parents are very much averse to shackling themselves with marital ties. They are fickle in their affection and knowing the facility with which, owing to their usefulness as workers in the fields, they can find protectors and employers from time to time, they prefer entering into temporary alliances which can be shaken off at will, to going through the ceremony of marriage which is binding for a lifetime."

Infidelity among women is not uncommon. This is amply borne out by their folk songs. The couplet below truly illustrates the prevailing situation:

In snow dissolves the cloud, gold is melted with borax;  
To what scoundrel has my wife's ear-ring fallen?

The first line is usually meaningless, and is merely added as an aid to rhyming.

Young widows are rare, but wherever they exist, they add to the attraction of the village.

In one hand an umbrella, in the other hand a fine cloak;  
From far on the other side you may recognize the wanton widow's gait.

Some of their couplets give insight into their feelings. It is very much on the pattern of Europe. The following may just as well apply to the Hyde Park of London:

The bee in the blossom, resting on the opening petal;  
The lover asleep, his head in his loved one's lap, his hand in hers.

Here is one on love, which may just as well be written by one of the Troubadors of France:

The wild flowers have blossomed in the crevices of the field banks;  
Thirst is not satisfied with a draught of water, love is not satisfied with words.

When men are away from their homes, their main pre-occupation is the search for feminine beauty. This seems to be the chief excuse for fairs and festivals all over the world. Some keep their eyes low and see furtively lest people suspect. Some gaze brazenly. There is, however, no doubt that the fairs are full of hungry roving eyes.

After we had had a good look at the variety of hill people who had assembled at the fair, we sat down on large stones facing the current of the river.

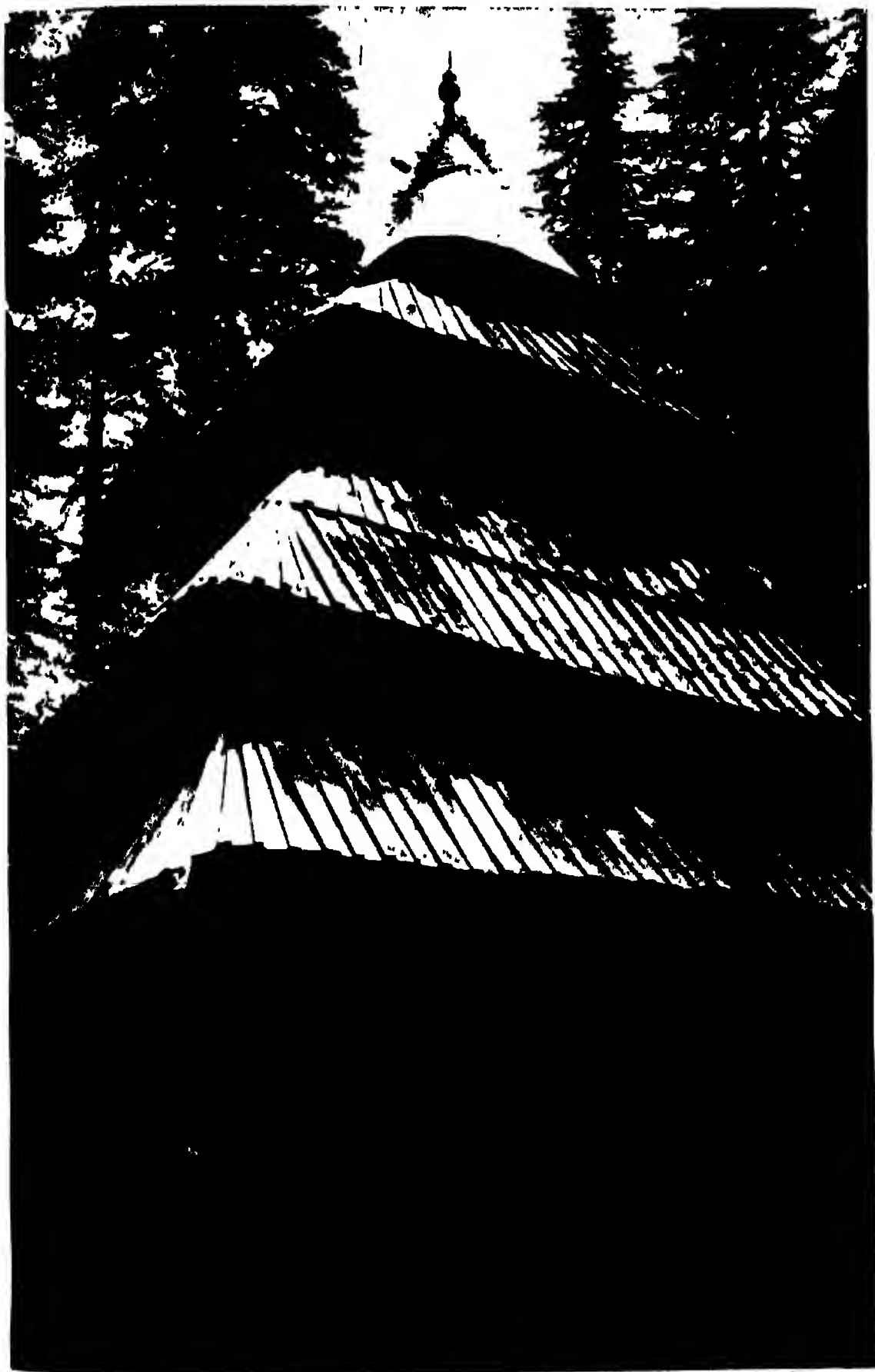


FIG. 55 The temple of Hurma Devi at Manali



FIG. 56 A girl carrying paddy straw

FIG. 57 A Gaddi shepherd, grazing sheep below the Rohtang Pass





FIG. 58 A village in Lahaul, women washing utensils



FIG. 59 Two women from Spiti

FIG. 60 Lahauli women





FIG. 61 The castle of the Thakur of Gondhla. In the background is the mountain with several peaks.





FIG. 62. Tea party in Gondhla castle. Thakur Latchu Chandra on extreme right.

FIG. 63. The monks dancing at Gondhla monastery. Orchestra in the background.





FIG. 64. A village in Parau Valley.

FIG. 65. Kardong monastery on hilltop. In the foreground is a barley field with a chorten.





FIG. 66 The lamas and chomos of Kardong monastery welcoming our party

FIG. 67 Chorten of Lama Norblu Rinpoche in Kardong monastery





FIG. 68 The boredom of long winter night is broken by spinning wool on *takli*

FIG. 69 The author holding prayer wheels with the head lamas of Kardong monastery





FIG. 70 A village in Patan valley on the Chenab.



FIG. 71. Sutta stones at Nagga.

FIG. 72. Gajja women.





FIG. 73 A Brahmin girl wearing a *bahu* and her head crowned with a golden *choker*





FIG. 74 Music in Moonlight (Guler)



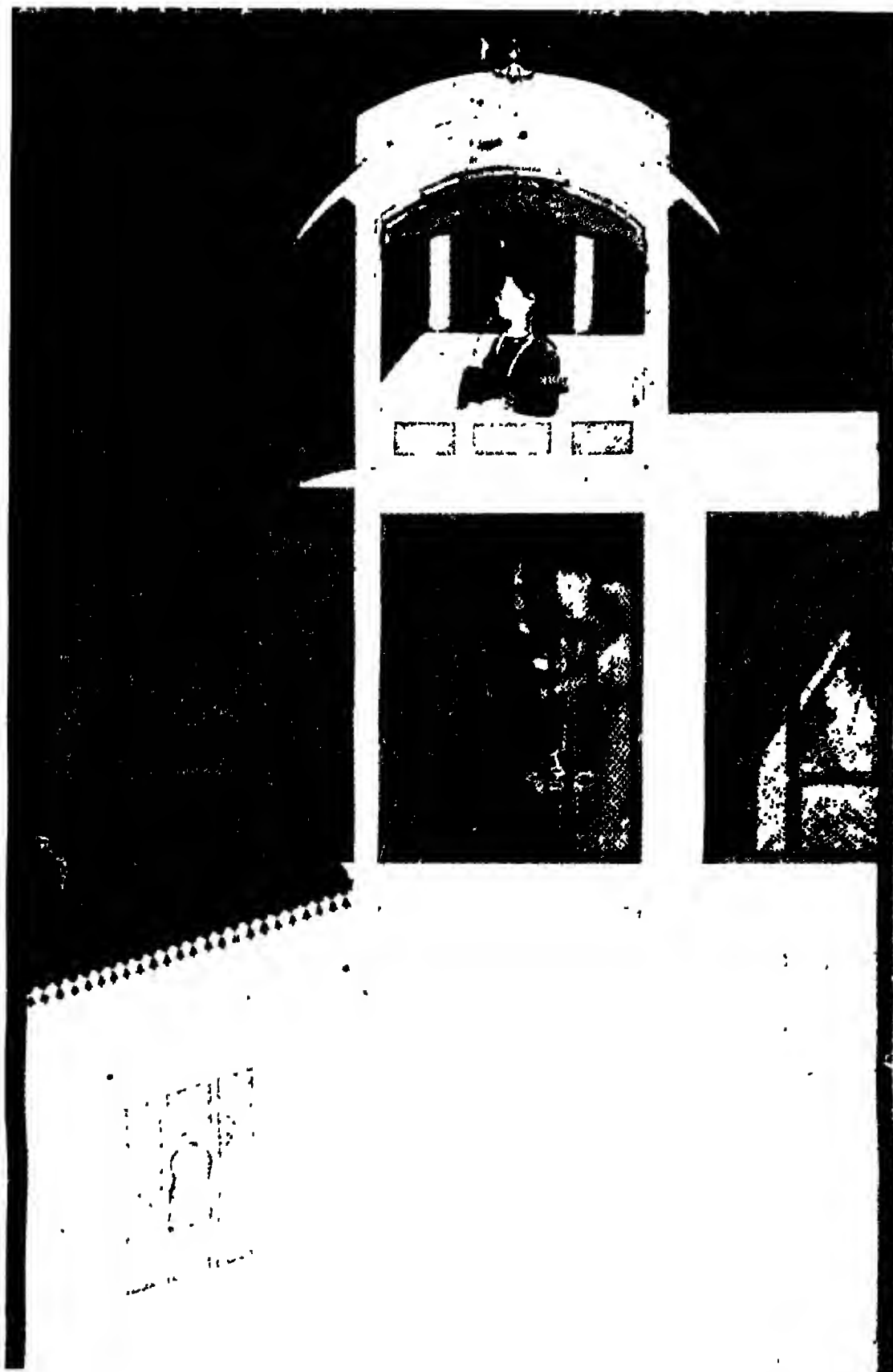


FIG. 75 Lady yearning for her lover (*Galer* : 18th Century)



FIG. 76 A glimpse of the beloved (*Kangra*)



FIG. 77 Baz Bahadur and Rupmati riding by night (*Kungya* · C. 1810)

"In which part of the Himalaya do you find the prettiest women?" asked Archer.

"Gilgit is supposed to have the most beautiful women," I replied. "They have slim and graceful figures, black hair, hazel eyes, white and regular teeth, and complexion so fair and delicate, that a traveller mentions that when they drank, water was perceivable in their throats."

"What about the women of the Kashmir Valley?"

"The women of Kashmir have been admired over the centuries for their fine forms and clear complexions. The nobles of the Mughal emperors selected their wives and concubines from among them. This was not only on account of their preference for beauty, but more because of the concern that their children be fairer than Indians, so that they can pass off as genuine Mughals. Colour prejudice is not merely the product of European colonialism. About three thousand years ago, the Aryans practised it on the dark aboriginal inhabitants of India. The Mughals had a contempt for their dark subjects, and they regarded their own pale faces as a symbol of superiority. The demand for Kashmiri women continued unabated even during the Sikh rule in the Punjab, and large numbers were exported to Lahore and Delhi to stock the harems of the Sikhs, Hindus and Mussalmans."

"Were they also popular with the Sikh court of Lahore?"

"Yes. Very much so," I replied. "You must have read travellers' accounts of Ranjit Singh's 'Amazons'. They were mainly recruited from among the Kashmiri women. When Soltykoff, the Russian traveller met Ranjit to seek his permission to travel in the Valley, he was shown five of them. When they sat before him, Soltykoff was dazzled. 'They were a long way the prettiest girls I had seen in India, and I should have admired them in any country,' he remarked. When they retired, Soltykoff was duly warned by Court, a French adventurer employed by Ranjit Singh. 'Perhaps he will send them to you. Be on your guard. You can only amuse yourself with them at the expense of your dignity and character,' said Court. Soltykoff, who unlike Court was not a Joseph, remarks that he was much afraid Ranjit would send them, for they were so pretty that he was doubtful, if his virtue would have stood the strain."

"What about the women of the Punjab hills," asked Archer.

"You have seen them yourself. Some of the Brahmin and Rajput women of the Kangra Valley are very pretty. Their features are chiselled, and their beauty is calm and serene. They look as though they have stepped out of the paintings," I replied.

The sun was setting, and the priests made preparations for putting the gods to sleep. The fair was dispersing, and only those villagers who had come from distant villages remained. By collecting stones they made *chulhas* and lighted fires for cooking their meals. Curling columns of smoke and flickering flames of fire could be seen in all directions. A group of Kulu men stood in a circle around a bonfire of pine cones. They were swaying and

moving slowly and singing. I was agreeably surprised that the subject of their song was not love, but praise of their valley. Translated in English, it is as below:

Our Kulu Valley is a garden

We are its flowers.

Its cool air and crystal springs of water

Are gifts of God.

In Ogee is the sacred temple of Vashisht,

In Rupi are the hot springs of Manikaran.

Our soil produces abundant crops of wheat and paddy,

The snow-covered peaks of our mountains

Are in communion with the heavens,

Kulu is the land of gods!

## Two Great Mountain-Painters

**T**HE PAINTINGS OF the Himalayas in contemporary art attract me as strongly as the ancient miniature paintings. In fact, they had drawn my attention, earlier. In 1928, I happened to see an exhibition of the paintings of the Himalayas by Nicholas Roerich at Lahore. The majesty and the calm of the Himalayas were vividly portrayed in these paintings. On my return to India in 1934 from London, the reminiscence of that great experience came back to me. I wrote to Roerich, expressing my admiration of his paintings which had a mystic quality. He warmly responded and an interesting correspondence, which I greatly enjoyed, developed. In 1940, I saw some of his paintings in the Allahabad Municipal Museum. On a visit to New York in November 1945, I saw a choice collection of his paintings in the Roerich Museum. In December 1947, I invited him to New Delhi for an exhibition of his paintings under the auspices of the All-India Fine Arts and Crafts Society. Unfortunately, he fell seriously ill at Naggar and passed away. However, the paintings came and drew admiring crowds for many weeks, and among them was the Prime Minister of India, Jawaharlal Nehru.

The opportunity to see Roerich's home at Naggar came when I travelled from Narkanda to Kulu. After seeing the Dussehra festival at Kulu, I motored to Katrain. From Sultanpur to Katrain (4,400 feet), the Beas River kept us company all the way. At some places, the banks of the river were high and steep, hung with bushes and creepers, and soon afterwards we were again at the level of the river which gently murmured over stones. Its channels were shaded by alders, and at its sides were meadows and marshes dotted with elms and poplars. The alder groves near Katrain were particularly fascinating on account of their age and size. The play of sunlight and shade on the flocks of sheep driven by Gaddi shepherds when they passed through the avenues of alders, was enchanting. Such idyllic scenes add to the charm of the Himalayan valleys.

The valley, thickly populated, is about one to two miles wide, and on

the slopes of the plateaus are groups of houses, surrounded by walnut and apricot-trees. The mountains stand back on either side and the river terraces run down with a gentle slope from the base of the mountains, to the banks of the river. It is these river terraces which along with alder-trees give such a characteristic appearance to the Kulu Valley. They are carefully cultivated and irrigated by *kūls*, and bumper crops of wheat, paddy and maize are raised. It is on these fertile river terraces that the well-known orchards of apples, persimmons and cherries are grown. The islands in the bed of the river covered with alders, break the river into numerous streams. This part of the country from Katrain onwards is most picturesque and is remarkably beautiful. There is rich cultivation at Katrain and there are a number of apple orchards. The rest house at Katrain is pleasantly situated on a high terrace overlooking the river, and is a favourite of sportsmen who are fond of fishing. For me, it was a great pleasure to watch the river from the verandah and to hear its unceasing music which almost lulled me to sleep.

Crossing the Beas by a suspension bridge, we walked towards Naggar. The climb is steep and I had to halt after every few minutes to admire the beauties of nature and to regain my breath. Ahead of me a hillyman was carrying a heavy load on his back. I often wondered whether the hill people really liked this type of work. I was surprised to learn that they too considered load-carrying a punishment, and not a source of joy. The couplet below gives their views on the subject:

A steep hillside, puffing and blowing and faint;

The man who has to carry a load on his back, must have been a sinner  
in his past life

Slowly we reached Naggar (5,780 feet). This village has a quaint old-world charm. It was founded by Raja Visudh Pal, and after Jagat Sukh, it was the capital of the Kulu State for a considerable length of time. It is situated on a wide spur which commands an excellent view of the river and the valley beyond. The most conspicuous building in the village is the castle, a barn-like building with its walls consisting of alternating layers of timber and stone. It is one of the most central landmarks of the valley and was the royal palace. With the British occupation of the Punjab hills, when Naggar was selected as the headquarters of the Assistant Commissioner, the castle was converted into a residential house. Now that the subdivisional headquarters have shifted to Sultanpur, it is used as a civil rest-house. The stones for this building were brought by Raja Sidh Singh from Baragarh Fort on the bluff across the Beas Valley. The castle is a gloomy building, and has a reputation of being haunted. Its dark and dingy rooms and musty Victorian furniture left no doubt in my mind that it was an abode of evil spirits.

Mrs R.H. Tyacke, an English woman who came to Kulu in 1892 to shoot bears, also visited Naggar and its castle. About the castle, and its

ghost she writes, "This castle, itself old, replaces a still older one, which stood a few thousand feet higher, at Chajōga," and was burnt down. The legend of its destruction runs thus! : The reigning Raja had two wives, one of whom had presented him with a son. Not contented, however, he took unto himself two more, and appears to have been cordially detested by them all. The latest acquisition, indeed, took such a dislike to him that she was determined to murder him. Consulting the other wives, she laid the following plot: As it was desirable to continue the *raj*, and as only one of them had a child, it was decided that that one should escape with her son from the castle, and that the others should perish with their lord and master, in the approved Hindu fashion. Accordingly they closed and barred the only two entrances to the building, and, during the night, set fire to it at both ends, and were all burnt alive. The castle was never rebuilt, but a new one was erected at Naggar. The story goes that when the young Raja came to man's estate, and heard the story of his father's tragic death, and how it had been planned by his youngest wife, he issued an edict that all the women of the village whence she had been taken, should, for all time, be compelled to wear a large iron ring suspended from the left ear. Strange as it may appear, though over a thousand years have passed since this order was promulgated, it was almost invariably adhered to till within the last few years, when pressure was put upon the Government to revoke it, and stop the practice. Even today, however, I am told, it is not unusual to see many women of that village, wearing the badge of the disgrace of their kinswoman of centuries ago.

"In the courtyard of the castle, we noticed a small square structure, which we might have taken for a duck-house, had it not been pointed out to us as a temple. It contains a large slab of stone, some six feet square and four feet thick, which is said to have been deposited there by wild bees. The slab is an object of much veneration to the people round about, who throng the courtyard in great numbers, placing offerings upon it, of rice, meal, and wild flowers. The little temple was formerly the scene of a curious custom, for settling legal disputes. Two goats, one, the property of the plaintiff, and the other, of the defendant, were placed in the temple, and the Brahmin in charge sprinkled water on each. The case was decided in favour of the owner of the goat who first shook off the water. They say, not so many years ago, this method of settling a dispute was resorted to by the Assistant Commissioner at that time under the following circumstances. Two old women had a quarrel about some jewels, each accusing the other of having stolen them. They did not appeal to the Commissioner in court, but persistently worried him to settle the case for them informally. To get rid of the importunate widows, the official bethought him of the time-honoured goat-test. He tried it; and whichever goat shook first - - I forget which it was—the owner of the other said it was evidently the pleasure of the god of the temple that she should lose, and both departed satisfied!"



Many legends are connected with this old castle built nearly a thousand years ago, and, of course, it boasts of a ghost! The story of the apparition runs as follows: "Centuries ago, one of the Rajas, then occupying it, gave an entertainment on the grass-plot in front of the castle. This entertainment consisted of wrestling matches, performing goats and other animals, then as now, beloved of natives, and was viewed by the Raja, his Ranee, and his courtiers from the verandah thirty feet above the lawn. While the games were going on, the Raja turned to his consort and asked her whom she considered the handsomest man there, intending, I suppose, that she should specify himself. But she pointed out one of the wrestlers, a fine handsome man and commenced to dilate on his charms. Forthwith the jealous Raja fell into a perfect paroxysm of rage, and ordered his Wazir that the wrestler should be beheaded on the spot. This was immediately done, before the Ranee's very eyes. She, shocked and horrified with the Rajah's cruelty, and distressed for the man she had so much admired, rushed round the verandah to the far side of the house, which overhangs the cliff by three or four hundred feet, and flung herself over the balcony into the abyss. She now, of course, 'walks' at night, in the above-mentioned verandah, but did not honour us with a visit during our few weeks' stay at the castle."\*

Not far from the castle is a collection of *suttee* stones lying against the hillside. *Barselas*, as they are called, represent Rajas and their queens and concubines who performed *suttee* with their royal masters. In some of them, solitary figures are carved, standing with folded hands. In another, below the figure of the Raja, there are nine figures of females. In yet another, the Raja is seated on a throne surrounded by two female attendants, and below this group are fifty female figures who stand with folded hands in five rows. He must have been a powerful Raja who commanded the love and respect of so many women.

Near the entrance to the village is a Shiva temple. It is an elegant 12th century stone temple. In front is a Nandi bull. The *shikhara* is beautifully carved and has the insignia of the Trimurti in front.

On the outskirts of Naggar is another temple of great beauty. It is pagoda-like, with a timber roof in three tiers and harmonizes with the crowns of cedars which surround it. On going inside, I discovered that it contained only a few pointed stones, and no image. The *deota* is represented by masks of silver which are kept locked up in the treasure-house and are taken out only on ceremonial occasions when they are fastened to a sedan-like structure draped in red cloth and marched on men's shoulders. This temple had a large establishment, a *kārdār* or manager, an accountant, a *pujāri* or priest who performs worship, several musicians who play the *narsinghas* and drums, standard-bearers who carry flags, torch-bearers, blacksmiths, carpenters,

\* R.H. Tyacke, *How I Shot My Bears, or Two Years' Tent Life in Kullu and Lahoul*, London, 1893, pp. 108-111.

florists who decorate the *rath* with flowers, watchmen and messengers. All these persons were assigned the land of the *deota* rent-free, in lieu of pay. Apart from these, there were several *chelās* or dedicated persons who grow long hair, and the gurus who interpret the oracle. They must be in great demand by the faithful.

A Dussehra festival used to be held on the hill-side adjoining the temple. This festival lasted till late in the night. F. St. J. Gore who saw it in 1894 writes, "It would be well, however, if the *mela* ended at sundown, for by this time the frequent drafts of *luggi*, a wretched spirit which is distilled from rice, have inflamed the passions of the men, and with the increasing excitement, the fun grows boisterous. Torches are lit, and by their glare the revel is continued far into the night, with all the evil consequences of free intercourse of sexes under such circumstances. Dazzled by the light, the noise, the music, it can cause but little surprise that the women, with no home ties as we know them to bind them, wander off with their lovers into the dark forest, where, in the warm night, the tall deodars spread their sheltering branches over them."\*

I enquired from a villager about Roerich's home. I was informed that it was nearby, and felt reassured. I passed through a forest of cedars and in a few minutes reached the Roerich Villa, which turned out to be more interesting than the castle. Near the entrance gate was a large collection of stone sculptures from the valley. Under a tree was Guga Chauhan on horseback. In the background were the snowy peaks and below were the paddy terraces. The walls of the villa were covered with ivy, and a giant agave was in bloom, bearing spire-like panicles of fragrant white flowers. Below the villa was an orchard, and in it under the shade of a young pine-tree was a rough-hewn granite rock which marked the place where Nicholas Roerich was cremated. A Himalayan rock symbolically marks the last resting-place of this great mountain-painter, and on it is a simple inscription in Devanagari mentioning that Maharishi Roerich breathed his last in December 1947. Above the inscription are three circles representing art, science and literature.

Who was Nicholas Roerich? We learnt from his son Svetoslav who is also a great painter of the mountains and mystical themes, that his family left Russia during the Revolution and sought refuge in Sweden. From that country, they migrated to America. They were in search of a quiet place and music India had greater appeal to them than the modern America. They came to India in 1923 and settled down at Naggar in the Kulu Valley. They never regretted the choice and in the quiet of Naggar, the father and son worked ceaselessly. They painted the mountains of India and Tibet, as a background to the teachings of the Buddha and the *rishis*.

\* F. St. J. Gore, *Lights and Shades of Hill Life in the Afghan and Hindu Highlands of the Punjab*—A Contrast, London, 1895, p. 97

It was indeed a happy event for India that this talented Russian family settled in Kulu from where they disseminated throughout the world the glory of the Himalayas in their paintings. Nicholas Roerich made a deep and intimate study of the rocks and mountains of the inner Himalayas, and his Himalayan landscapes reveal unearthly beauty and grandeur. His colours may appear exaggerated to the people who live in the dusty plains, but those who have had an opportunity of travelling in high altitudes know what brilliant colours can be seen at dawn and at sunset. Nicholas Roerich is not an ordinary landscape artist. It is nature strained through a fine consciousness, that we find revealed in his paintings. In his mountain pictures are solitary figures of lamas, *sadhus*, or hillmen standing before snow-covered peaks, symbolizing the insignificance of man before the mighty forces of nature. These landscapes are not merely records of places, but a means of recording the sense of grandeur and exaltation which the artist felt looking at these mountains. On seeing lonely pilgrims ploughing their way through snowy wastes, a feeling of sadness steals over us. The sight of *rishis* lost in meditation in the Himalayan caves reminds us of an aspect of life which we are fast forgetting in the din of the cities. No doubt it has been correctly observed that every landscape is a state of the soul. In each of these landscapes we see a beautiful soul! In the quiet of Naggar, Nicholas Roerich led a creative life, pervaded by spiritual understanding and harmony. He placed the Kulu Valley on the cultural map of the world.

Like his father, Svetoslav Roerich is also a great painter of the mountains! He also explored the hills for their lost art, and has a collection of miniature paintings from Kulu and Bilaspur. He truly has the sense of the Beautiful, and from this is born his creativeness. His paintings of the Kulu Valley are fascinating and I was delighted to see them. The impression which he has given of the picturesque Dussehra of Kulu in a masterly painting, reminded me of the colourful humanity of the Kulu Valley. Women draped in multi-coloured blankets and laden with silver ornaments, and men blowing trumpets, carried their god in a palanquin. In this painting, the men and women of Kulu will live for long.

An interesting festival which is celebrated in the latter half of December in Kulu is Koli-ri-Diali. Men assemble in the village green during the evening and sing ribald songs till late. Last of all a chorus in honour of Hurna Devi is sung. The men stand in a circle and dance slowly as they sing, and occasionally the circle whirls madly round, each man tugging his neighbour towards the inside or towards the outside of the ring. With three cheers given in English style, shouting "Diali ai Diali," all disperse to their homes. A signal for the commencement of the illumination is given from the castle at Naggar, and is caught up at once by the villagers on the opposite side of the valley. It is flashed up and down the valley and from side to side. Lighted torches of pine-wood are seen in every house and in every hamlet in the Beas Valley for an hour or two, and the effect is enchanting. Svetoslav

has portrayed this festival in a remarkable painting. A torch-light procession on a mountain pass is shown, and the golden glow of the torches contrast with the purple-blue of the night. This remarkable painting had a haunting beauty, and I often see it in my dreams. Does it not show cosmos, nature and man?

## The Goddess of Manali

AS WE WALKED from Naggar to Manali, we passed by Raini, a tributary of the Beas, which rises in the east from the valley below the Hamta Pass. The approach to Manali is indicated by the shrubs of *Crataegus* with fern-like leaves, which cover the hill slopes. Manali is known for its cedar forests. There is a magnificent cedar forest close to the bazaar. The boulders in the forest are covered with green moss reminding one of the moss-garden of Kyoto. Some of the trees reach a great height and their spreading horizontal branches slowly taper to a point, giving them the appearance of cathedrals.

Manali was founded by Manu Rishi and a temple is dedicated to him in the village, about a couple of miles from the Civil Rest House. Close to the Civil Rest House are four giant cedars which are over a thousand years old. The oldest cedar known as 'Trevor Deota' after Mr Trevors, a forest officer, is about two miles from Manali. The Forest Rest-House is about a furlong from the Civil Rest-House. Its compound is lined by a magnificent avenue of lime (*Tilia europea*). The lime trees have straight trunks and are covered with thick dark-green glossy foliage and have pale-yellow flowers which are full of honey, an irresistible attraction to millions of bees. Lime is a successful introduction from Europe along with the ash, Spanish chestnut, the English beech (*Fagus sylvatica*), and the English oak, (*Quercus glabra*). Opposite the bungalow is an experimental plantation of medicinal plants, such as ephedra, artemisia, digitalis and pyrethrum. Wild roses which were in full bloom about the middle of April in the Kangra Valley were still flowering at Manali in the middle of June. Branches of cherry-trees in the orchards were studded with red and purple fruit. The fields of wheat and barley were still to be harvested. The velvet green seedlings of paddy in the nursery beds were ready for transplanting.

The Beas Valley above Manali has a colouring of its own which is not to be matched in other parts of the Himalayas. The dark-blue spruce, yew and silver fir adorn the valley at higher altitudes whereas lower down, the light-green translucent foliage of chestnuts and walnuts has its own charm.

In autumn when the clear blue sky returns, the valley gets tinted with brilliant colours. The forests of alders and chestnuts show wonderful tints of crimson and gold. The farmers' houses glow with the rich amber of the maize cobs which are spread on the roof to dry, while the fields are painted crimson by the ripened crop of amaranth. In the distant horizon are the snowy peaks, with an indigo-blue sky in the background.

Environment has had a great influence on the growth of religions. The monotheism of Semitic religions, intolerant and uncompromising, had its birth in the deserts of Arabia and Palestine. Arabia has a monotonous landscape, a vast expanse of sand dunes and barren rocks, and a clear cloudless sky with the sun shining in all its ferocity. In such an environment one is reminded of a Being, who is all-powerful and unrelenting and commands absolute obedience from all sentient beings. India, with its forests, rivers and mountains, on the other hand, gave rise to polytheistic cults which saw gods and goddesses in water-falls, mountains and trees of the forest. The landscape of Kulu with its forests of stately cedars, groves of dark-green alders, roaring torrents, streams with clear water murmuring over stony rapids, awesome gorges and precipitous mountain passes with gaping chasms below, and the snow-covered peaks with their flanks clothed with glaciers, gave rise to the *deota* cult, a curious amalgam of animism, demonism and Hinduism.

A hillman's life is spent in dangerous surroundings, where a false step will land him in a deep gorge or lash him against the boulders in a torrent. Hence he naturally thinks of forces which would protect him against unexpected dangers. He peoples his universe with gods and goddesses, some benevolent who must be loved, and others ferocious and malevolent who have to be feared and respected. When in trouble, he goes to his *deotas* for help. The *deotas* also keep a check on his actions, thus ensuring moral conduct. The spread of education no doubt will erode their belief in their gods and goddesses. It will be a great pity, indeed, for it is the rainbow-like web of imagination and superstition, which makes their lives colourful and interesting.

The Kulu Valley was entirely covered with forests about 3,000 years ago and the aboriginal inhabitants, whose descendants are known today as Kanets, Kolis and Dagis, were mainly hunters and food-gatherers. The early Aryan sages and *rishis* who settled in the valley about 400 B.C. created such an impression among the aboriginal population by their superior wisdom and conduct, that they were deified by them. Manu, Vashisht, Vyas, Gautam, and Srunga are some of these *rishis*. The temple of Vashisht is across the Beas. It encloses hot-water springs and its entrance gate is richly carved. On the lintel is a chain of love, a frieze of human figures. It is an interesting example of the folk art of the hills, which is fast vanishing.

Some of the aboriginal women of remarkable beauty and personality married the Aryan migrants and thus achieved divinity, such as Hurma:

Devi of Manali who is said to have married Bhima Hurma Devi, also called Harumba Devi, is the sylvan deity of Manali. The peopling of Kulu is attributed to her. Her pagoda-like temple is situated in the cedar forest of Dhungri close to the orchards of the Banous. The approach to the temple is most picturesque. The bridle-road is shaded by chestnuts, limes, maples and cedars. The translucent leaves of chestnuts, the dark foliage of cedars and the play of sunlight and shade on them lend a peculiar charm to this place. Ultimately, one reaches a magnificent forest of cedars with a network of glacial streams. The background is provided by the terraced fields of the village of Manali and the snow-covered mountains from which the Manali Nala takes its birth. Water-mills worked by a *kul* on the sloping ground opposite, present an idyllic scene. There are huge blocks of granite at the entrance of the forest which harmonise with the cedars. The impression one gets is that of a Japanese rock garden. From this point a walk across the paddy fields takes one to the Dhungri forest in which the temple of Hurma is situated.

The giant cedars, some of which are more than a thousand years old, and the large boulders imbedded in the meadow provide a majestic setting to this temple and create a deep impression of power. Ferns with fronds coiled like watch-springs, and sword-like blades of irises bursting out of a grass-covered soil lend a peculiar charm to this place. The temple is built of timber and stones plastered with mud, and the roof consists of four tiers, the last one tapering into a cone, thus harmonizing with the spire-like crowns of the cedars. The temple was built by Raja Bahadur Singh in 1553. The entrance door is carved with the images of Hurma Devi, Krishna and the *gopis* (milkmaids), and Shiva and Parvati. The wall above the door is decorated with antlers of the *barasinga*, and horns of *Ovis*, *thars* and gorals. The interior is dark and gloomy and below the boulders are small brass images of Hurma and other deities.

There is a legend that the Pandava Brothers took refuge in the Dhungri forest during their sojourn in the Kulu Valley. The aboriginal chief, named Hiram, did not like the incursion of these strangers in his territory and he sent his sister Hurma to kill them. Hurma saw Bhima, the Pandava sleeping in the forest with his head resting on a stone. Enchanted by his manly beauty, Hurma changed her mind, fell in love with him and ultimately married him.

Another legend says that Hurma who lived in Manali was not on happy terms with Gautam Rishi who built a dam across the bed of the Beas with the object of drowning Hurma and her people. When the dam burst, Hurma was washed down the mountain, and her knee was caught among the stones at Dhungri where her temple is now situated.

Hurma enjoys the privilege of having her own festival, and a fair is held in the Dhungri forest in her honour in the middle of May. It lasts for three days, and about five thousand men, women, and children assemble

in the cedar forest. Rice-beer is freely consumed by both men and women who spend the day in dance and music. The *deotas*, Kartik Swami of Simsa, Chhandal Rikhi of Parsha, Srishti Narain of Alco, Shrishan of Jagat Sukh, and Vishnu of Sajoli, are brought by their followers to Dhungri. On the fourth day, the fair shifts to the temple of Manu. Dhungri forest provides a grand setting to the assemblage of hill-women in their colourful clothes.

The goddess Hurma has a brother, the god Jamlu, whose chief temple is at Malana in the north of Kulu. Malana is a large village in a long narrow valley formed by a river which runs into the Parbati, the cultivated land lies on both sides of the stream, the ground is very precipitous, and the village lies high; there is no other village near it, and it is difficult of access. Malana Valley, isolated from the rest of Kulu, has a strange population. The men and women have straight noses and their features are more refined than those of the other inhabitants of the Kulu Valley. They are usually dressed in black woollen clothes and women wear boat-shaped caps. Their language is different from that of the Kulu people and is allied to Tibetan and Burmese. The valley is so cut off from the outer world that no oxen are yet to be found in it, and till recently the women and children had never even seen a pony. In the isolation of their valley, cut off by steep mountains, the Malana people even during the British rule enjoyed a type of independence, and this part of the country was sometimes referred to as 'Malana Republic'. They settled their disputes by arbitration, or, by an appeal to an ordeal, in which each party selected a goat beneath the skin of which, the priest injected poison and the person whose goat died first was regarded guilty.

In Malana, the home of the god Jamlu, is on a huge table of rock at the head of the valley, perched amid the snows. Jamlu's supreme authority can be judged from the fact that he frequently fines other *deotas* whose people have been guilty of misconduct and come to him for help in times of drought.

In the Malana temple, there is a silver image of an elephant, with a figure in gold on its back, said to have been presented by the Emperor Akbar. It is said that a *sadhu* received two pices from the treasury of Jamlu on his visit to Malana. During his travels when he reached Delhi, his two pices were collected from him as poll-tax. It is said that soon afterwards Akbar became afflicted with leprosy and on consulting the Brahmins, he was told that an insult had been offered to god Jamlu and the two pices must be restored, if he wished to recover. When the treasury was searched, the two pices from Malana were found stuck together. The Brahmin priests asked Akbar to take the coins in person to Malana and to restore them to the god. Akbar, being too busy to take a trip to Malana, requested for a compromise and it was agreed that a gold image of the Emperor and a silver image of his court be sent instead. When the images reached the temple of the god in the Malana Valley, the wrath of Jamlu was appeased and Akbar recovered from leprosy. This event is celebrated in Phagun when the images of Akbar and his court are brought out to do homage to Jamlu.



Jamlu was greatly feared in the Raja's time: because of him, Malana was a city of refuge, from where no criminal could be carried off. It is said that Tulsu Negi, the unpopular Minister of Raja Jit Singh, was disliked by the people of Kulu. Hounded by the people of Saraj, his women sought sanctuary in Jamlu's temple in Prini. The Sarajis dragged the women from their sanctuary, pelted them with stones and took them to their houses to work as domestic servants. Though Tulsu's family was by no means worthy of Jamlu's protection, the god was annoyed at the violation of his sanctuary. The curse of Jamlu lay on Saraj; crops failed, cattle died, and babies became lean. Ultimately, the Sarajis decided to make amends to Jamlu. The chief of Shangri as the representative of the people of Saraj went with a cow to the temple of Jamlu, accompanied by a large number of priests to make their submission to the god. They made dolls of grass and *bhojpatra* bark to represent their ancestors, tied them together and chopped them up before Jamlu. Thus Jamlu was appeased and the curse was lifted from Saraj, which again had abundant rains and bountiful crops.

In its chequered history, Kulu also had a Buddhistic interlude. Hiuen Tsiang, the Chinese traveller, describes a visit to Kaluta, the name by which Kulu was known in the seventh century. He mentions of a stupa, erected by Ashoka in the middle of the Valley to commemorate a visit of the Buddha. He states that there were twenty monasteries, and a thousand cave shelters in the rocks in which the monks and the hermits lived. Some of these cave shelters can still be seen in the Valley, and now they are being used by weavers for installing their handlooms.

Writing in 1870, Mr Howell reports an interesting incident relating to the Tibetan occupation of the upper Beas valley. He says, "A monk came with credentials from Lhasa addressed to the late Thakur Hari Singh, of Lahaul, and he also had in his possession an ancient map of Manali and of an old Buddhist monastery which once stood there. He stated that the monks who occupied it had been driven out of the valley in a hurry, and had hidden their library in a cave, which they had closed by concealing the mouth with a pile of logs and sealing it with a curse, calculated to deter the boldest Kulu man from interfering with the logs. When the monk reached Manali, he went straight to the pile of logs in front of the Manali Temple, and was at once confronted with the curse, making it impossible for him to touch them. The mystery thus remains unsolved."

The Tibetan occupation of the upper Beas valley is also indicated by place names. Most of the passes and the upper river valleys had Tibetan names, e.g. the Rohtang Pass at the head of the Beas valley, the Pangchi Pass between Ruppi and Inner Saraj and Shungchu and Tung Passes in Inner Saraj. The Tibetans being accustomed to high altitudes did not like to come down below 8,000 feet. All their outposts were, therefore at a level higher than 8,000 feet. They formed settlements at the head of all the side ravines of the Beas, each of which was controlled by a high official. The

object of these outposts was to guard the trade route between Spiti and the Kulu Valley. Out of these officials, one called Piti Thakur earned considerable notoriety. He lived in a fort, the remains of which are visible on a spur above Jagat Sukh. He is said to have drunk human milk and performed human sacrifice. Piti Thakur's place of worship was the Prini Temple of Jamlu at the foot of the approach to the Hamta Pass, leading from Jagat Sukh to the Chandra Valley. Even now, men from Spiti come to this temple to make their offerings and they have the privilege of entering the precincts of the temple fully shod, whereas others have to remove their shoes. It is said that the priest of the temple speaks in the Tibetan language during a trance and mentions that the god came from Tibet.

Buddhism which once flourished in Kulu has now practically disappeared. The only symbol of Buddhism in the Kulu Valley is a stone image of Avalokitesvara in a temple of Kapila Muni at Kelat, north of Sultanpur.



**lahaul**



## In the Inner Himalayas

**T**HE ORIGIN OF the early school of hill painting, named after the Basohli State, is a subject of controversy among the scholars of Indian art. Svetoslav Roerich was of the view that it had some link with the Tibetan paintings of Lahaul and Spiti. Lahaul and Spiti occupy the trough between the central and outer Himalayas. It is shut in to the north, and divided from Ladakh and Chinese Tibet by the great snowy range of the main inner Himalayas. To the south it is shut in and divided from Chamba and Kulu by the mid-Himalayas. To the west, it borders on Chamba-Lahaul, from which it is separated by a lofty offshoot from the outer Himalayas. In the middle, it is cut in two by the Palamo ridge, some four or five miles long and 15,000 feet high, which forms the boundary between Lahaul and Spiti.

I decided to make a trip to Lahaul in June 1952 to verify the comments of Svetoslav. On this journey I was accompanied by my wife and elder son Surrindar. We engaged mules for the transport of our luggage from Manali, and trekked to Kayelang.

From Manali we crossed the Beas by a timber bridge, and walked along its left bank. For a couple of miles we passed through flat country covered with alders and poplars. On the flanks of the mountains were prosperous villages.

We reached Palchan, where the Solang Nala joins the Beas. From Palchan to Kothi, there was a stiff climb. Below Kothi, the river plunges into a chasm closed by perpendicular cliffs. For about 3,000 yards, the river passes through narrow rocks and at places, it is about a hundred feet deep. In the bed of the gorge were large rocks on which cedars were growing. It must have taken the river thousands of years to saw through the rocks. Opposite the bungalow at Kothi were spatulate rocks covered with yews similar in shape to those seen in the Chinese landscape paintings.

At Rahla, below the Rohtang Pass was a ruined dak-bungalow. Quiet reigns in the forest below the pass and it is difficult to imagine that it was the scene of a bloody massacre. According to Hutchison and Vogel, the

historians of the Punjab Himalayas, during the reign of Narad Pal, the Gaddi army from Chamba advanced to Majna Kot and built a fortress. After a long-drawn-out war, peace was concluded between the Chamba forces and the Kulu people. Ostensibly to fraternize with the Chamba soldiers, the Kulu people invited them for a feast at Kothi. The narrow gorge of the river was spanned by two beams with planks. The Kulu men removed the planks and instead spread long grass. Many of the Chamba soldiers, who arrived in the darkness, fell into the river and were drowned, and the rest who turned back were slaughtered by the Kulu men. The memory of this incident made us cross the bridge with caution.

Near Rahla, the Beas passes with a fall of forty feet into a narrow channel which plunges into the Kothi gorge. The forest at Rahla, along the bed of the river contains walnut, maple, sycamore, silver fir and spruce. Above Rahla stunted *bhojpatra* (birches) cling to the steep hillside.

Near Rahla, an enterprising Lahauli had set up a tea shop, which he had proudly named, Rahla Hotel. His customers were mainly mule-drivers. After peeping into the hotel of this troglodyte, we started the ascent. Snow had mostly melted and only at some corners were patches of fresh snow encountered. The river takes its birth from a cairn-like structure on the top of the Rohtang Pass called Beas Kund, where it is hardly five to six feet wide. The top of the pass at 13,050 feet is windy, and on stormy days men get blown off.

As we descended the Rohtang Pass, the Chandra River appeared like a grey line coming down from the snow-clad mountains of Spiti. On the right was the upper valley of the Chandra. The hills swept down wild and barren to the river, and ended in broken cliffs, the base of which was choked with the debris of disintegrating rocks. Above, the scene was equally desolate: not a tree nor a bush nor a blade of grass.

As soon as one crosses the Rohtang Pass and enters the valley of the Chandra, one immediately realizes that it is a country inhabited by people whose faces, dress, religion and surroundings are entirely at variance with those of the rest of the hill people. We are amongst people who are semi-Mongolians; we are amongst cheerful women with oval faces and almond eyes; we are amongst Mani walls, chortens, prayer flags, monasteries, villages composed of houses with flat roofs; we are among men who are constantly accompanying mules and ponies carrying precious loads of *kuth*; we are among men who whistle to the sheep and goats, which carry heavy loads on their backs, and in a country where *churus* and yaks replace the diminutive black cattle of the lower hills. It is a strange country which charms at first sight and for which one forms an attachment which never fades.

On reaching the level bridle-road, the village of Khoksar consisting of a few houses, was seen across the river on a slope. The greyish-brown mud-houses were surrounded by fields green with a rich growth of grass, *kuth* (*Saussurea lappa*) and barley. The travellers' bungalow is about two

miles from the village of Khoksar at 10,800 feet above sea-level. At the entrance on the roadside is a long wall of stones, four to five feet high and three to four feet wide, the Mani wall on which stones carved with the sacred *mantra* 'Om Mani Padme Hum', the jewel is in the lotus, were placed by the Lahauli merchants when proceeding on long and perilous journeys. At the end of the Mani wall was a chorten, a conical building erected in honour of a lama. The Mani wall and chorten were surrounded on both sides by foot-paths, and the passers-by keep them on their right side. The bungalow, a two-roomed hut, remains buried under snow for at least five months in the year. Opposite the bungalow is Grumpu, a small village consisting of about five houses with a monastery sheltered under a ledge in the background. There was a solitary lama living in this monastery. Apart from a couple of old banners which were affected by damp, and the figures of Tibetan saints, there was nothing else of much interest.

The scenery, however, was overpowering in its grandeur. It is a wild and desolate rocky country, and the small village surrounded by cultivated land, was a mere speck below the barren rocks.

After spending an uncomfortable night in the damp bungalow, we decided in favour of an early start. The bridle-road from Khoksar to Kayelang is a busy artery of commerce. Strings of mules laden with *kuth*, the fragrance of which could be felt from a distance, were racing towards Manali. The jingling of their bells filled the air with strange music, so pleasing to the ear in this wilderness. The Lahaulis are proud of their mules and decorate the foreheads of these animals with pieces of old, red and yellow Tibetan carpets, cut into attractive oak-leaf patterns. A large number of goats and sheep carrying wheat in small panniers were moving towards Kayelang. A man followed by two women labourers was ploughing a piece of land with the aid of a pair of *churus*. It was my first encounter with these strange animals, which are cow and yak hybrids.

The road on which we were travelling leads to the well-known temple of Triloki Nath in Chamba Lahaul. Ill-clad pilgrims, men, women and children from Spiti accompanied by small donkeys carrying their belongings were on their way to Triloki Nath. I asked two women who looked like twins to pose for a photo and they gladly responded. The Spitians encourage their children to beg from the passers-by. When asked where they were from, they replied, "Piti", for they seldom pronounce the 'S' attached so unnecessarily to the name of their homeland.

There was no sign of any vegetation in the neighbourhood of Khoksar. As we walked towards Sissu, the landscape changed. The mountains to the left of the river were covered with dark-green mats of straggling cotoneaster. Further down we saw an entire hillside covered with *bhojpatra* birches with their curved white stems glistening in the morning sun. Behind us were the snow-covered peaks of Spiti shining like molten silver. In front was the peak of Goshal, and on the sides, the ramparts of the middle and inner



Himalayas sculptured into a series of pyramids, cones, and steep ridges. These cones have green bases and are capped with silver crowns. On both sides of the Chandra were countless snow bridges, which from a distance appeared dirty-grey and below them streams of crystal-clear water flowed into the river. There were countless waterfalls roaring down the hillside. As we approached Sissu, groves of willows were seen. The mountain-sides were covered with velvet-like grass with stripes of deep yellow; these were buttercups growing along the streams. Some of the slopes were densely covered with purple and mauve irises. Their survival in a heavily grazed valley is explained by the fact that they are poisonous plants.

The bungalow at Sissu is built on a plateau overlooking the Chandra River. A waterfall on the rocks on the other side of the river provides an unending source of enjoyment. The small streams which bubble through the meadows at Sissu empty themselves into a small lake from which I collected a number of algae. There are waterfalls all along the route from Khoksar to Gondhla, and rainbows can be seen in the morning when the rays of the rising sun pass through the fine spray of water.

Adjoining the bungalow at Sissu is the village of Kwaling consisting of five houses, all neat and clean. There is something pretty and smiling about Kwaling, which makes a pleasant impression on the visitor from the plains. The houses in Lahaul are very different in appearance from those of Kulu, Kangra or Simla. They have flat roofs, and the walls are made of stone neatly plastered with mud both outside and inside. About six years ago, these houses were dirty hovels. With the acquisition of wealth, mainly from *kuth*, and supplemented by military pensions, the villagers have greatly improved their living conditions. The largest house was a three-storeyed building with eight rooms belonging to a retired soldier Tachhi Ram. The ground-floor served as a cattle-shed in which Tachhi Ram kept his three *churus*, a pony and a calf. The first floor served as a godown, and in it were neatly arranged rows of panniers filled with wheat, barley, and buckwheat. The family lived on the second floor. There were three rooms all mud-plastered, one of which served as a living-room. The inmates sleep on the floor, as beds are not known in Lahaul. The bedroom presented an orderly appearance; a number of coats were hanging from pegs on a wall and on the opposite side were hats of different types. Tachhi Ram, a pony fancier, had built a collection of bridles of various types purchased from Tibetan merchants. Some of them were beautifully enamelled. Many pack-saddles were also hanging on the walls. On the wall was an array of regimental and group photographs, and calendars with portraits of Guru Nanak and Rana Pratap. Hanging from the roof were balls of wool spun during the winter. Facing the living-room was the prayer-room decorated with *thankas* painted by a local lama. A brass image of the Buddha enclosed in a glass-case was kept in an almirah, in which books in Tibetan script wrapped in pieces of silk cloth were also stored. A prayer-wheel and a number of brass

vessels were arranged in a neat row in front of the image of the Buddha. Tashi Dorje, the lama, who lives in the Laphran Gompa was invited twice a year to read the sacred text and conduct the ceremonial worship. Along with the inmates of the house, the lama feeds on goat's meat and *chang*. The third room was the kitchen. In the centre of the room was a fireplace, and the pots and pans were hung on the wall in an orderly manner. The roof of the large room was supported by a double row of wooden pillars. Inside were large corn-chests made of slate set in wooden frames, large stone bowls from Iskardo, iron cauldrons, cooking-pots, an iron tripod, wooden dishes and earthen pots. At the corners of the house were flag-staffs from which hung prayer-banners on which the sacred texts were printed in Tibetan script. Adjoining the house was a small garden planted about forty years ago by Tondup Schering, the father of Tachhi Ram. There were 15 poplars and ten apple trees which were in blossom. All the houses had windows with glass panes. A portion of the room in which the cattle were tied was also used as a drop latrine. Cattle dung, droppings of goats and sheep and excreta of human beings go on accumulating throughout the winter and in due course a rich manure is ready. On account of the low temperature, the houses do not stink, the fields are not fouled, and there is no fly-breeding.

Adjoining the houses was a schoolroom where about twenty boys from five different villages assembled for lessons under the shade of a willow tree. A bubbling stream with crystal-clear water flowed in the middle of the street where the housewives gathered for cleaning utensils and washing clothes.

The Lahaulis are a mixed race and in their features we see a combination of Mongolian and Aryan traits. The figures both of men and women are short and stout. Their slightly high cheek-bones and oblique almond-like eyes are indications of a Mongolian origin, whereas their straight noses are an index of Aryan blood. Their complexions are ruddy-brown. The faces of some of the old men and women are heavily wrinkled. They are cheerful and their faces bear a look of honesty and smiling good humour, which is rather remarkable, considering the hard conditions under which they live.

The men are shrewd and because of their extensive travels in Tibet, Ladakh, the Kulu Valley and Amritsar and Calcutta in the plains of India, they possess considerable business acumen. They are a manly race who are not afraid of hazards; they cross high passes which are often snow-bound and are not afraid of deep gorges, narrow footpaths and avalanches. When they meet their superiors, they are completely at ease and do not show any inferiority complex. This is, however, not a recent acquisition. A British Assistant Commissioner who visited Lahaul in 1884 writes: "They have few ideas in respect of manners; when holding a court or a meeting, I have often seen the whole assembly burst into a roar of laughter on my making

a mistake in the language of a ludicrous character, and a man would fill and light his pipe under my nose on similar occasions without thinking of asking leave. But these same people answered all my questions very carefully, and carried out my orders with great fidelity."

The Lahaulis are peace-loving people and violent crime is almost unknown among them. Possibly, this is due to the influence of Buddhism, and most of the cases which come to the court of the Naib Tehsildar at Kayelang relate to offences against the Forest Act. On account of the intense cold during winter, they consume large quantities of home-brewed barley beer called *chang*. They also distil a type of whisky from barley. From November to March, the villages remain buried under snow and the villagers find it difficult even to get outside their houses. They keep large stocks of fuel consisting of juniper bushes, *bhojpatra* birches and pencil cedar as well as dung-cakes of the cattle and *churu*.

As in the case of men, the women's faces also indicate their mixed origin. Some of them have Aryan noses and clear-cut features, but their eyes are always oblique. Some, particularly the younger lot, can be called good-looking. With their oval faces, almond-like eyes and ruddy complexion, they are a picture of health. Unlike other hill-women, the Lahauli women are fond of washing and I saw a number of them combing their hair and washing their faces at the village fountains, and proudly displaying their towels, combs and hand-mirrors.

Dolman and Angmon are popular names among women and these names are used alone or are suffixed to other words. Some of the common names of women are Sonam Dolman, Chhering Dolman, Phamchog Dolman, Hishe Dolman, Tashi Palmon, Tashi Yanki, Chhering Yanki, Sonam Angmon, Chheme Angmon, Deki and Hishe Banti.

Women wear tight *pajamas*, choga-like shirts tied at the waist with a *kamarband* and a waistcoat. They have a preference for maroon and dark-brown colours. The coiffure of the women of Kayelang is most elaborate. The hair is twisted into numerous pigtails which are held in position by a plate-like silver ornament hanging at the waist. At the back of the head is an ornament and on the temples are two amber-coloured balls. This elaborate coiffure exercises considerable pull on the hair and consequently due to the loss of hair most of the women have broad foreheads. They wear straw shoes, the soles of which are made of barley straw, and the upper part, from strings of cannabis fibre, coloured green and red. Such shoes are ideal for walking on the snow. The shoes worn by the well-to-do classes are, however, fur-lined.

The Lahauli women are very hardworking, and while the men are plying their mules, they help in agricultural operations. Ploughing and harvesting are done jointly by men and women. Women can be seen leading the bull *churus* by their nose-rings when the land is ploughed. They follow the plough and sow seeds of barley and buckwheat. In the fields, groups

of women hoeing, weeding and irrigating are a common sight. When harvesting a crop, or hoeing, they relieve the monotony of their toil by singing songs. In spite of the hard work, the women are cheerful. When meeting strangers, they are not at all shy and give polite replies. When asked about their village, they invariably add the suffix 'ji' to their answers, which is a very polite Punjabi word, meaning 'yes, sir'.

Young men and women freely come into contact with one another and love affairs develop, which ultimately result in marriages. When a boy and a girl make up their minds to marry, the girl is abducted by the boy. He sends a pot of *chang* to the father of the girl and if the pot is accepted the betrothal takes place, followed by a religious ceremony. A lama reads out verses from a holy book, while men and women sit round with clasped hands and downcast eyes and repeat the verses after him very much in the manner of the Sikhs. A social celebration follows which consists of feasts in which much *chang* is drunk.

Polyandry or taking of one woman as a wife by several brothers is a recognized institution in Lahaul, the object being the prevention of the division of the land. Before the British regime, the law of primogeniture prevailed. The entire landed property was inherited by the eldest brother and the others had to earn their livelihood by engaging themselves in service, trade or by becoming lamas in monasteries. This ensured a population control which stabilized the agricultural economy of Lahaul, at a reasonable level.

## The Robber Baron of Gondhla

**W**E LEFT THE travellers' bungalow at Sissu at 7 a.m. when the sun had just risen. Our destination was Gondhla where we were expected by lunch time. On the way we passed through the village of Rupshing. Lying against the walls of houses in Rupshing were ladders of a peculiar type. These were just beams of cedar with notches, which provided a precarious foothold. Nothing more primitive could be imagined than these ladders, but we were told that they were expertly used and there were no accidents.

We crossed the Gephan Nala which passes through a deep gorge before it joins the Chandra. The Gephan peak is seen from the Kulu Valley through a gap in the mid-Himalayas. On the roadside is the Temple of Gephan, the god of the mountain, a malevolent deity who raises storms and throws avalanches on the mountaineers who invade his snow-bound sanctuary. Lahaulis hold feasts in his honour and make sacrifices to propitiate him.

The road from Rupshing to Gondhla is picturesque. On the northern side the country opens out, cultivation increases, the hamlets are larger, and the houses are better built. We passed by the hamlets of Shuling, Jugley, Khangsar and Khining. Khangsar is a prosperous village and the best house belongs to the Thakur, a prominent land-owner of Lahaul. As we approached Gondhla, we passed through a fine grove of willows. The eight-storeyed castle of the Thakur of Gondhla, a prominent feature of the landscape of the Valley, was visible from afar. The house, whose photographs are included in most of the books on the Lahaul Valley, was built by Thakur Rattan Pal about four hundred years ago. The tradition is, that the Pal Rajputs migrated from Bengal to the village of Beer in Kangra. Rattan Pal came from Beer to Gondhla and became the feudal lord of the area. The castle is built of alternating layers of stones and cedar timber, brought from the Dungri forest of Manali. It was a big job transporting timber over the Rohtang Pass and the entire male population of the Gondhla Valley may have been utilized.

From Khangsar onwards it is the Gondhla massif which dominates the

valley. Avalanches could be seen rolling down the steep sides of the rock accompanied by a terrific booming noise. The height of the Gondhla rock is said to be 11,000 feet above the level of the river, and this means that its peak reaches an altitude of about 20,000 feet or so. Such a sheer rise is to be seen in few other places in the world. At the base of the massif, some cultivation is carried on and in the meadows Gaddi shepherds graze their sheep. Above the bluish alpine zone, the massif rises steeply. A waterfall, taking its birth from a glacier which was rapidly melting, provided us with considerable amusement. In the after-glow of the evening, the snow-covered top of the massif was transformed into rich copper.

The present Thakur of Gondhla, Fateh Chand, is a young man of about thirty-five. He invited us to the castle. His drawing-room on the third floor was tastefully decorated in Tibetan style. The floor was covered with Tibetan carpets and the walls were decorated with *thankas* painted by Lama Yun Tuse who belongs to the village of Sumunu in Kothi Tandi. Lama Yun Tuse is a well-known painter of the Tibetan style. He decorated the walls and the ceiling of the room with the traditional cloud designs which were very attractive. We enjoyed having tea with the Thakur. From the sitting-room there is an excellent view of the village of Gondhla. In the fifth storey is the family chapel of the Thakur, in which images of the Buddha, Padma Sambhava and Tara Devi are kept. At the entrance to the chapel are large drums hanging from the roof. The room above the chapel is a museum of ancient weapons and armour. Apart from the old arms, the Thakur has kept in it, pieces of goat's meat, which were two years old and were still edible. The climate of Lahaul deserves to be blessed for this.

Fateh Chand showed me some books and journals in English which contained an account of Gondhla and his castle. In one of these a lurid description of Gondhla was given, and he was described as a robber baron. When I read the description to him translated in Punjabi, he was amused. The author obviously did not realize that his book would also reach Gondhla, in the inner Himalayas.

In Lahaul we find a blend of Buddhist and Hindu cultures. Some of the Lahaulis have Buddhist as well as Hindu names. We could see this blend of cultures in Thakur Fateh Chand's household. Fateh Chand has also a Tibetan name. He has two wives, a Tibetan and a Rajput. The Tibetan wife lives at Gondhla all the year round even braving the hard winter, whereas the Rajput lady lives in the Kulu Valley. Fateh Chand worships the Buddha and the Buddhist saints at Gondhla, whereas in Kulu he worships Shiva and the Devi. Though he speaks Punjabi and Hindustani, his own language is Tibetan.

I asked Fateh Chand, how the people spent winter when the valley was covered with snow. He replied that while some families migrated to the more congenial Kulu Valley, others brightened their dull existence by entertaining one another. As their winter existence is more or less a type of

simple imprisonment, they make the best of it. In early December the leading families of the Thakurs who reside in Gondhla, Gumring and Khangsar start a round of feasts. The Thakur invites all the inhabitants of the village to his house. At about 4 p.m., they are given salted, buttered, soup-like Tibetan tea. A large number of cups of tea are consumed and tea-drinking keeps them busy for a few hours. Then follows a round of *chang*. At about 8 p.m., they have their dinner consisting of curried goat's flesh and fermented buckwheat bread. The Lahaulis are particularly fond of old meat. Goat's meat over two years old is regarded as a delicacy. They have also no objection to eating the flesh of animals which die a natural death, and Gaddi shepherds find ready customers for their sheep and goats which die on account of disease or accident during their sojourn in the Lahaul Valley. The dinner is followed by another round of *chang*. When they are full of *chang* and meat, they become hilarious, and both men and women sing Tibetan songs in which the exploits of their ancestors who originally peopled the valley are related. At about 10 p.m. the women and children leave and an hour later, the men. Later on, each one of the invitees, invites the rest and, thus, the round of feasts once started, lasts for about a month.

The tedium of long winter nights is also broken by work. Wool-spinning is fashionable with both men and women. As they spin the wool thread on a *takli*, they also gossip. Looms are found in most houses and both the men and women take turns at them. The woollen cloth which they prepare is used for domestic consumption and there is very little for sale or export. Spinning wool is their chief occupation in winter; on fine days, the loom is brought out, and some weaving is done.

After entertaining us in the castle, Fateh Chand took us to the Gondhla monastery. We were welcomed by two monks who were standing on the roof blowing trumpets. Viewed against the snow-covered mountains, the lamas looked very picturesque.

In the chapel were lacquered statues of Tibetan saints, Padma Sambhava and others. The lamas of this monastery performed the co-called Devil Dance for our benefit. Attired in colourful costumes and their faces covered with hideous masks, the lamas who had been regaled on *chang* gave an enthusiastic performance. The Devil Dance depicts the triumph of good over evil. While the lamas were dancing in the open, the orchestra of drums and trumpets was seated on a raised platform in a verandah. As the dance reached the crescendo, the drum beats became louder and louder, and the trumpets brayed.

Close to the school building at Gondhla is a huge rock on which the figures of the Buddha and two of his disciples are carved. It was probably the first sketch made by a sculptor, who, it seems, could not complete his work. It reminded me of a painting by Nicholas Roerich who paid a visit to Lahaul many years ago, and possibly saw this rock.

Between the Thakur's castle and the dak-bungalow is a grove of willows.

The neatly plastered houses of Gondhla, with windows provided with glass panes, bespeak of prosperity. At the outer boundary of the village is an impressive *chorten*. As we left Gondhla, the village of Thoring is to the right under the shadow of red and blue rocks. About a mile from Gondhla, is the Sila gompa on the top of a steep rock, in which there is a cave. At the entrance to the cave is a *chorten*. A solitary lama looks after the gompa.

About two miles from Gondhla, we had an excellent view of Gephan. A conical peak covered with snow, Gephan dominates the Chandra Valley like a monarch. Further on, there was an extensive piece of level ground on which the Lahauli merchants had pitched their tents. Panniers filled with wheat were arranged in neat walls to provide shelter against the raging wind. Scores of ponies, and hundreds of sheep and goats grazing, made a pretty picture. The Chandra flows in a deep gorge at this place and on the left are the villages of Muling and Bargul, separated by a roaring torrent. The slopes above the villages are thinly covered with dwarfish kail (*Pinus excelsa*) and pencil cedar.

The Lahaul Valley is filled with a peculiar radiance. The sky is a clear blue, without any trace of haze, dust or clouds. The bold outlines of the mountains with their jagged and sharp peaks covered with dazzling white snow reflecting the light, create a scene of sunshine and splendour. The valley is bathed in a flood of light. In the mornings and in the evenings brilliant dawns and sunsets are seen. On the 25th of June, we were rewarded with the most glorious sunset we had seen so far. The rays of the setting sun had transformed the snow-clad mountains of Spiti into molten gold. The clouds on the Goshal peak were tinged with gold. Soon, they became coppery and ultimately steel-grey. The sun had set, but light still lingered in the valley.

At night, the stars shone with a brilliance which cannot be matched in the plains. They also appear, to be more numerous, The Milky Way looked like a phosphorescent cloud laid like a garland of jasmines on the snow peaks. It was a moonless night, but the starlight was not faint as it is in the plains, but was quite bright.

The rays of the sun are rich in ultra-violet rays, which rapidly tan the skin and in the case of persons who have sensitive skins, the skin starts peeling off after a couple of days. Some of the Tibetan women plaster their faces with a black coat of *silajit* paste as a protective device. The colour of the vegetation, particularly in *Dangs* or pastures, is rich blue-green. Vegetables, such as cabbages, turnips and potatoes were also of an unusually large size. The clear blue snow peaks, steep rock faces, the absence of trees and shrubs, powerful light of the sun and the strong clear atmosphere give a definite character to this country, which can rightly be called the Valley of Light.



## Monks and Monasteries

**W**E WERE ON our way to Kayelang and Kardong which are famous for their monasteries. We also expected to see the confluence of the Chandra and the Bhaga, where they join to form the Chenab. As we were looking forward to the novel experience of seeing the monks and monasteries of Lahaul at a close range, we had no difficulty in making an early start from Gondhla.

On the way we had a close view of the Goshal peak whose highly folded strata appeared like the leaves of a crumpled book. On the right side were eroded rocks formed of black slates which were crumbling down in the form of *bajri* to the bed of the river. These rocks were possibly of Cambrian Age. Fossils of trilobites, brachiopods, crinoids, corals, gastropods, and other marine animals have been found from similar rocks in Spiti. These rocks are more ancient than the Himalayas themselves and were in the bed of the Tethys Ocean which covered northern India, the present Himalayan region as well as Tibet. About sixty million years ago, the strata were raised into peaks from the chaotic waters of the Tethys and were crowned with the everlasting snows. Looking at these ancient rocks covered with eternal snow, the entire period of human history with its stresses and struggles, jealousies and hatreds appears insignificant.

From the stratified rocks which are found on both sides of the bridle-road, there is a steep descent to the bed of the Chandra. A little lower down, the Chandra and the Bhaga meet, and at the confluence is a *chorten* which provides a foreground to this meeting place, of the rivers. Behind it is a steep rock on which the monastery of Guru Ghantal is perched. It is the largest monastery in Lahaul. I learnt that it was in a state of decay and only a solitary lama kept it going.

Crossing the Bhaga by a suspension bridge we found that we were only four miles from Kayelang. The rocks were covered with artemisia which filled the atmosphere with its rich aroma. The village of Kardong surrounded by blue-green fields, was now in sight and looked impressive against the background of snow-covered mountains. Passing through an avenue of

willows, we reached the village of Billing. After crossing the Billing Nala by a bridge, we entered the outskirts of Kayelang, the chief village in the Lahaul Valley. The village *abadi* is divided into two sites, upper and lower Kayelang. In the main village of Kayelang is the sub-tehsil building, a post office, a hospital, a middle school and a small bazaar consisting of about five shops.

The soil of Kayelang is fertile and bumper crops of barley and *kuth* are raised. Crops are irrigated by skilfully cut-out water-courses which were brimming over with crystal-clear water. The sub-tehsil building was decorated by a border of deep-yellow roses. This was a variety which I had not seen before. The bazaar was full of children and traders from Spiti, Ladakh, Zaskar, Kulu and Hoshiarpur. The potters of Hoshiarpur had a considerable share in the central Asian trade which has now dwindled. Because of the Chinese occupation of Tibet, Tibetan salt and borax also did not reach the Lahaul market.

The travellers' bungalow at Kayelang is about half a mile from the tehsil building, and commands an excellent view of the snow-covered peaks on three sides. A row of poplars in front of the bungalow with their shining leaves appeared very beautiful against the background of the snows. On all sides were rich fields of barley in which *chortens* were built to bless and protect the crops.

Near the village of Kayelang is a large pencil cedar, about fourteen and a half feet in girth. It is said to be over a thousand years old, and is worshipped as a *deota*. The story goes that before this tree, in ancient times, a child was annually sacrificed to propitiate the spirit who resided in it. The children were supplied in turn by the different families of the village. It so happened one year, that the turn for offering the child of the required age, was that of a widow with an only child. The day before her child was to be taken from her she wept loudly, when a travelling lama from Tibet met her, and asked the cause of her distress. Having heard her story, the lama said: "Well, I will go instead of your child." He did so, but did not allow himself to be killed: "The spirit must kill me himself if he wants human flesh," said he. So saying, he sat down before the tree and waited for a long time. As the demon made no attack on him, he became angry, took down from the tree the signs and effigies, and threw them into the Bhaga River, telling the people not to sacrifice any more human beings. This advice was readily followed by the people of Kayelang. The demon fled and settled on the top of the Koko Pass, where it still dwells under the name of the Kayelang *Lha* or god of Kayelang, getting now only the annual sacrifice of a sheep supplied by the shepherds.

The Moravian missionaries who made Kayelang their headquarters about 1860 and who left the valley in 1942 on account of differences with the local Thakur, have left their mark on the valley and the people. Pioneers among them were Mr and Mrs Heyde who lived in Kayelang for 50 years.

They were followed by Mr and Mrs Schnabel. Schnabel was a distinguished Tibetan scholar who translated the Bible into Tibetan. The last of the missionaries was Peter who was a versatile person. They made no converts, for there were two insuperable obstacles to the acceptance of the new faith, viz., the incomprehensibility of the doctrine of Trinity, and the impossibility of virgin birth. Buddhism is particularly suitable for the people of the Inner Himalaya because of its picturesque ceremonial, and the art and architecture it has inspired. That is why it continues to persist in this area, though it has withered in the land of its birth. Besides, Buddhism is a religion which has no conflict with science and as such it has great appeal to intellectuals too. The Christian missionaries made their impact on people not through their theology, but through medical aid and education. The Moravian missionaries, unlike the others, adopted the unusual approach of agricultural extension work. They introduced potatoes, tomatoes, and cabbages into the Lahaul Valley. The women-folk of the missionaries taught the Lahauli women the knitting of socks and pull-overs. The missionaries also popularised windows with glass panes which are now common in the villages in the valley. In some of the villages like Kardong, they also introduced iron stoves with chimneys. The unprecedented prosperity which the Lahaul farmers enjoyed on account of the introduction of *kuth*, which was selling at Rs. 300 per maund, greatly helped them in improving their standard of housing.

The most popular monastery in Lahaul, is that of Kardong on the other side of the Bhaga opposite Kayelang. We sent a message to the monastery about our intended visit. A narrow path shaded by willow trees, led to the monastery. Then followed a steep descent to the level of the Bhaga, which was crossed by a bridge. Next, we encountered an equally steep ascent till the village of Kardong was reached. Kardong with its congested houses looked like a beehive. The flat-roofed three-storeyed houses are massed together in two blocks, so as to enable indoor communication in winter. The clumps of willows on the green turf, and the terraced fields with crops of barley and *kuth* were a pleasant sight. The fields were heavily fenced to keep out flocks of goats and sheep. After passing through the fields we made our way through pastures covered with alpine flowers like blue gentians, pink androsace and white edelweiss.

As we reached the monastery and approached the *chortens*, we saw the lamas wearing red hats and maroon and yellow robes and standing on the roof blowing trumpets and beating drums to welcome us. Against the background of snow-clad mountains, the lamas looked very impressive. Scherip, the Head Lama, offered me a pair of incense sticks. Following him, we entered the monastery. In the portico was a row of prayer cylinders. There were four chapels in the monastery and in one of them the ashes of Lama Norbhu Rimpoche, who established the monastery, were interned in a silver-coated *chorten*. The walls were decorated with colourful paintings of considerable merit. However, I could discover no affinity

between these paintings and those from Basohli. A Tantric painting in which two figures, a male and a female, were shown in ecstatic union, decorated one of the walls. The female figure, the Shakti represents the creative principle, and her symbolic union with male energy represents the highest bliss, the ecstasy of the mystics when the self is forgotten. What effect this painting had on the emotions of the *chomos* (nuns) was difficult to investigate because of the language barrier —possibly very little, due to its association with religion. Besides, cold and high altitudes have a depressing effect on the sex instinct. Brass images were ranged on shelves on one side of the altar and on the other stood a book-case full of the sacred books. The books consisted of bundles of loose sheets printed in the Tibetan language from engraved slabs and wrapped in silk handkerchiefs. Cylindrical prayer-wheels, which spin round at a slight touch of the finger, were placed on each side of the altar. After visiting this shrine we were led to another chapel. In the centre, was an image of Triloki Nath, with 11 heads and one thousand hands. It had a benign expression which did not fail to impress us. The walls were painted with figures of the incarnations of the Buddha, of the coming *avatars* of the next age, and of Lama Rimpoche, Atisha, Padma Sambhava and other Tibetan saints. I have already mentioned Padma Sambhava in my account of Rawalsar, the lake with floating islands in the Mandi District. This great teacher who flourished in the second half of the eighth century came from the Swat Valley. A restless man, he made several journeys on foot from Tibet to the Kashmir Valley, and vice versa via Rawalsar. It was he who introduced the Vajrayana faith into Tibet, which developed into lamaism with its images and ritual. Among the Buddhist saints, he is the most revered and his images are installed in all the Himalayan monasteries.

Paintings of male and female divinities, saints and demons painted in brilliant blue and red, on cloth with silk borders were hung on the walls. Some of these banners were brought from Lhasa by the monks when they returned after taking the degree of Gelang. Narrow Tibetan carpets were spread lengthwise on the floor of the chapel, one for each monk. The Head Lama sat on a *chowki* above the common level of the floor. Next to him was the second lama who read the text from a book and also beat a drum hanging from the roof, with a curved stick. He was accompanied by another lama who also beat a drum in a similar fashion. Two lamas were blowing trumpets, and two *chomos* were blowing small horn-shaped trumpets. The monotone of the prayer accompanied with the sound of the drums and trumpets created a spiritual atmosphere, and I was greatly impressed with the dignity of the ceremonial.

After the round of chapels we were shown the store-rooms. In these rooms were stored besides the drums, trumpets and cymbals, the dresses, weapons, and masks used in the *cham* or devil dances, as well as the robes and hats worn by the lamas on ceremonial occasions.

The refectory or public kitchen is only used on the occasion of certain

festivals, which sometimes last several days, during which special services are performed in the chapels. While these festivals last, the monks mess together, eating meat, barley, and butter and drinking salted tea. To supply his private larder, each monk has, in the first place, all that he gets from his family; second, he has his share, according to his rank in the monastery, of the funeral offerings and of the harvest alms; third, anything he can acquire in the way of fees for attendance at marriages or other ceremonies, or in the way of wages for work done in the summer. Individual lamas also go on begging missions. We came across one at Kayelang wearing a magnificent tall red hat, carrying a bell in his left hand and a *damaru* in the right. The harvest alms consist of grain collected by parties of monks, just after the harvest. They go round from house to house in full dress, and standing in a row, chant verses, the burden of which is: "We are men who have given up the world, give us, in charity, the means of life; by so doing, you will please God whose servants we are." The receipts are considerable, as each house gives something to every party.

Separated by a lane, were the *dashas* or cells of the lamas and *chomos*. They were provided with windows with glass panes and prayer-flags could be seen fluttering over them. The lamas keep their books, clothes, and cooking-utensils in their *dashas* and also cook their meals in them. The nuns have separate cells and two to three live together. The Kardong monastery has twenty *dashas* which provide accommodation to twenty-two lamas and eight *chomos*.

After going round the monastery, we were entertained by the Head Lama at a tea-party. We sat on the roof, on cushions and in front of us were placed low tea-tables. The tea-kettle was placed on a copper brazier. It was windy on the roof and I borrowed a blanket from the lamas. They also gave me a hat and a prayer-wheel which I rotated in a clumsy manner, flanked by the two lamas. The tea was salted and buttered and I found it an ordeal to swallow it. Politeness dictated that I must drink it. However, when a *chomo* wanted to fill the empty cup again I spread my hands over the cup, indicating that I had had enough.

After taking leave of the lamas, we walked back to the Kayelang dak-bungalow and rested for the night. Early in the morning, we started on our homeward journey. Near Sissu, my son purchased from a Ladakhi merchant, a puppy, which bore the name of Dolman. It was so small that he found no difficulty in carrying it in the pocket of his coat. Carrying this souvenir, we made preparations to climb the Rohtang Pass.

Snow had quickly melted on the Rohtang Pass in our absence, and the alpine plants were sprouting out of the moist clay. From the top of the pass, we saw a panorama of snow peaks. As we stood facing the Chandra River, to our right were the snow peaks of Spiti; to the left were Gephan and other minor peaks of Lahaul; at the back were the Indra Killah and Deo Tibbi and the mountains of the Hamta Pass. White cumuli were slowly ascending

Deo Tibbi. Two black-headed eagles were soaring gracefully in the sky. These birds with their immense wingspread, would not find it difficult to lift young lambs.

The Rohtang Pass was by no means a wilderness and on the top of the pass we met the Gaddi shepherds from the Dhauladhar of Palampur accompanied by large flocks of goats and sheep. Following the Gaddis were the nomadic Khampas, who camp during winter in the Kulu Valley and migrate to Lahaul in June, and stay there till the end of October. Their neat little tents were perched on meadows along the pass. Totemistic symbols like brooms, peacock feathers, etc. were displayed at the back of their tents. Trains of mules from Zaskar and Lahaul, and red-robed lamas from Spiti made the pass colourful and lively.

Back in the plains of the Punjab, I still hear the jingling of bells, and see with my mind's eye the Lahaulis and their mules climbing the granite stairs of the Rohtang Pass. Their journeys seem endless, and the sound of the bells on their mules' necks is interminable. Men, women and children from Spiti clad in red clothes, Gaddis with yards of black woollen ropes wrapped round their waists whistling to their straying sheep and goats, khampas, their women with richly tanned faces clad in salwars and wearing necklaces of turquoises, leading ponies, and lonely men carrying loads on their backs, all pass before my eyes. And in the distant horizon I can see Lahaul, the Abode of Light, where the sky is intense blue, and the rocks crowned with white snow are shining in the sun.



**bāsohli  
and  
jammu**





## The Home of Basohli Painting

**T**HE SUN WAS setting behind a mushroom-like black cloud, which enhanced its splendour. The river was golden, and the distant purple hills were aglow with the radiance of the sun. It was the evening of October 3, 1957, and we were at the Canal Rest House at Madhopur, about eight miles from Pathankot. Madhopur provides a splendid view of the Ravi debouching into the Punjab plains. Towards the north-east are the hills of Kangra and Dalhousie, and immediately facing us are the Jammu hills. Somewhere in this region is the town of Basohli, now a forgotten place, but culturally very important. It was here, in the 17th century, that the Basohli school of hill painting developed. The Ministry of Information and Broadcasting of the Government of India decided in August, 1957, to publish a book on this school and gave me the assignment. I felt that without a first-hand acquaintance with the locale in which this style of painting was born, full justice could not be done to the subject. Therefore, availing myself of an opportunity in the first week of October, 1957, I decided to pay a visit to Basohli.

Years ago a large number of paintings with deep red borders, executed in a simple and bold style with lavish use of yellow, blue and red colours, were finding their way to the market in Amritsar. The antique-dealers of this town were unaware of their place of origin and styled them as 'Tibeti' pictures though they had no connection with Tibet. In 1916, Dr. Ananda Coomaraswamy classified the Pahari paintings in two groups: a southern series, which he called the 'School of Kangra', and a northern series which he named the 'School of Jammu', or the 'Dogra School', in which he included paintings in the Basohli style. The majority of paintings described by him as pertaining to the Jammu school really came from Basohli, Nurpur, Guler and from Kulu.

The first mention of the Basohli school occurs in the report of the Archaeological Survey of India for the year 1918-19. Ajit Ghose, a Bengali scholar, toured the capitals of the erstwhile Hill States of the Punjab and Jammu in 1928. After visiting Kangra and Guler, he proceeded to Nurpur,

where he saw some paintings which, the local people told him, had come from Basohli. From Nurpur he went to Basohli where he stayed for some days. However, he could not collect any paintings of merit. This was quite natural, since the Dogras of Jammu are secretive and suspicious of strangers. The importance of Ghose's visit to Basohli lies in the fact that it led to a more precise definition of the Basohli school. In 1930, French undertook a tour of Jammu and the Punjab Himalayas, and visited Nurpur, Haripur Guler, Sujanpur Tira, Nadaun and Kulu. He also journeyed to Basohli.

In my quest for paintings in the Punjab hills from 1950-55, I saw a number of works in the so-called Basohli style in the collections of Raja Baldev Singh of Haripur Guler, Raja Dhruv Dev Chand of Lambagraon, Mian Devi Chand of Nadaun, Wazir Kartar Singh of Bassa-Waziran Nurpur, Raja Raghubir Singh of Shangri in the Kulu Valley, Raja Rajinder Singh of Baghal and Kanwar Brijmohan Singh of Nalagarh. French found similar paintings in Chamba, Mandi and Suket. He concluded that the archaic style was the style of the Western Himalayas, until, in the seventeenth century the artists of the Kangra Valley, the cultural centre of this land, introduced the Mughal style into the ancient art. Thus the Kangra Valley school came into being, which in the 18th century spread north to Kashmir, and south to Garhwal. However, later research has indicated that there was no genetic relationship between the two styles of painting, which were two separate streams.

Now let me resume the account of my journey to Basohli. Early in the morning of October 4, we left the Canal Rest House at Madhopur accompanied by the Farm Superintendent from Jammu, who was our official guide on this trip. After clearing the formalities regarding permits at Lakhanpur, we continued our drive in a ramshackle jeep. On the way we crossed a number of dry river-beds strewn with boulders and rounded pebbles, varying in size from a man's head to a golf ball. During the monsoon, however, the streams are practically unfordable and for many weeks Basohli remains cut off. The road was fairly level and was flanked by trees of the Flame of the Forest. In the month of April it presents in an enchanting sight with its blaze of scarlet-crimson flowers. This tree figures in some of the Jammu paintings.

There was practically no traffic on the road, except for the Gujars with their families and droves of buffaloes. Their women, clad in black, embroidered shirts, and heavily laden with silver ornaments, were picturesque. The younger among them carried their infants pick-a-back, while the older ones were burdened with bundles containing sickles of all sizes, and churning sticks. It was a problem for us to drive through the herd of buffaloes, which stood in the middle of the road unperturbed by the blowing of the horn. It was only when they were given a sound beating by the Gujars with heavy sticks that they made way for the jeep. It was another matter with the bullocks which carried their belongings—they ran into

the forest at the sight of the vehicle, causing much worry to their owners, who, beyond their cattle, grass and the forest, are blissfully ignorant of the outside world. While the rest of India was changing, modernising at a slow pace, these biblical nomads remain quite unaffected, and seemed happy in their pristine squalor.

We kept pace with the river Ravi, which was to our right. After a couple of miles we parted company with the river and, ascending a steep climb, were soon upon the top of the Shiwaliks. Rounded pebbles studded the sides of the hills, reminding us that the mountain range is the uplifted bed of a prehistoric river. The fortress of Thein was in sight. Opposite, at a distance of a quarter of a mile, was a huge, flat rock, neatly pierced—the result, I was informed, of a cannon-ball fired through it by a Raja of Thein. Admiring the prowess of the Raja, we passed by the village of Thein and again descended to the level of the river. The Ravi now flowed placidly over a vast area and from a distance it looked like a huge lake glittering in the morning sun. We had an excellent view of the snow peaks from this point.

After we had covered seventeen miles by jeep the road came to an abrupt end. The turbulent Ravi had washed away a large section of the road during the monsoon. There was no choice but to walk the rest of the way. After passing along a track, recently hacked through a patch of forest, we eventually reached a level path flanked by maize fields. To save the crop from wild boars, the farmers had erected fences around the fields and *machans* could also be seen on which boys armed with slings were scaring away parrots.

Around twelve o'clock, the sun was hot. By the road was a giant pipal tree with a platform of stones as its base. We rested for a while under its hospitable shade. Basohli was still three miles away and in the background were the snow peaks glittering in the sun. Except for a couple of women, there was nobody in sight.

The Tehsildar of Basohli, who had received a telegram about our arrival, sent two ponies which met us on the road when we were only about three miles from our destination. Admiring the country-side, we slowly rode on and in an hour arrived at Basohli. The ruined palace of the Raja was in sight from the tehsil building. Except for a solitary pavilion, there was very little to show that the palace was once a magnificent building and was regarded as one of the seven wonders of the hills of Jammu. As we walked towards it, we passed by a ruined tower built on a hillock. This was the place where the Rajas of Basohli used to store gun-powder.

According to Kahn Singh Balauria, the historian of Basohli, the original site of the town was close to the right bank of the Ravi. Its ruins were seen until some years ago, but they have now been entirely washed away by the river. The Rajas of Chamba and Nurpur were constantly at war with the Rajas of Basohli and the riverside capital town was strategically insecure. It was to overcome this handicap that the present town was founded by Bhupat Pal in 1635.

A brief account of the Rajas of Basohli would not be out of place. Bhupat Pal, a contemporary of Jahangir, was a giant and a gourmand. He was a very powerful man and could rub out the letters on a rupee coin with his fingers. His daily consumption of food was sixteen seers of rice and a goat. His son Sangram Pal (1635-73) was a handsome prince. He was invited to the court of Delhi and the queens of Shah Jahan, who had heard of his good looks, expressed a desire to see him. He was taken into the women's apartments by Dara Shikoh, and he reached the entrance of the palace blind-folded. The queens said that the beauty of a man lay in his eyes and asked that the bandage be removed. This was done. They were greatly delighted with his presence and, after giving him presents, allowed him to leave for Basohli. His younger brother Hindal Pal was succeeded by Kirpal Pal (1687-93) under whom painting in Basohli style was initiated. Kirpal Pal's son Dhiraj Pal was a scholar, and a handsome man.

We decided to explore the ruins of the palace. After climbing over the crumbling walls, we saw the river flowing past below. There was a number of subterranean, cave-like chambers, now the haunt of flying-foxes. On the battlements a troop of monkeys were playing among the ruins. A huge male flew into a temper at the invasion of his sanctuary and was growling menacingly.

All the damage to the structure was done during the last half-century. Vigne, the English traveller who visited the region between 1835-39, admired the baronial appearance of the Raja's palace, which reminded him of the castle of Heidelberg.

French came to Basohli in April, 1930 from Chamba. After walking ten miles over a wild and precipitous path, he crossed the Ravi by a boat. Ascending to the town he slipped and hurt his left hand. At Basohli he met a merchant who dealt in furs of wild animals and who had a collection of paintings. These were all examples of the early 19th century Kangra style, and he did not see any Basohli specimens. What happened later is best narrated in French's own words: "After seeing the merchant's collection I went on to the palace. I found the inside of the palace a horrible ruin. As I clambered among the ruins I caught sight of a room on the fourth storey of the palace which seemed to have paintings on the walls. Next to it was the most enormous comb of wild bees which I had ever seen. It must have been over six feet long. My attention was fixed on the paintings in the room, and I tried to see if there was any possible way up to it.

The staircase was hopelessly broken, but as a member of the Himalayan Club I thought it my duty not to abandon the climb merely on that account. I peered round on all sides, and the more I looked at it the less I liked it. However, while searching for a way up I found that I got a very fair idea of what the paintings were, floral designs of an ordinary character. No sooner did I reach this satisfactory conclusion than I found myself entirely alone. The guides and loafers who had hitherto dogged my every step had vanished. I was not left long to wonder about the reason. There was an ominous hum-

ming, and suddenly I was stung in half a dozen places simultaneously on the face and neck. The wild bees were upon me. I remembered how people were sometimes killed by wild bees in India, and I ran for my life.

Out of the palace they chased me, up to the old tank, and from there to the open green and the village street. Everyone fled from my path when they saw the bees, but when I got to the village my porter came to my rescue with a blanket, which he flapped round me. This cleared the bees for a moment, and he said to me: "Come inside the house." We rushed inside a ruined house and he at once lit a fire in the doorway. The smoke drove the bees away. I had a number of bee-stings pulled out of me, and then started back for my camp 10 miles away. The only good result of the incident was that the pain of the bee-stings made me quite forget the pain in my hand from the fall on the hill."\*

Basohli has a population of about 7,000 and is a prosperous town judged by hill standards—it has even received the benefit of electricity. No doubt it is bereft of its past glories. In the 17th and 18th centuries it owed much of its prosperity to the fact that it was situated on the famous trade route which passed through Nahan, Bilaspur, Guler and Nurpur to Jammu. It is said that there were 700 families of Kashmiri *pashmina*-weavers who built up a flourishing trade.

We had learnt that an album of Basohli paintings had been presented in 1956 by a Brahmin of Basohli to Bakshi Ghulam Mohammad, Prime Minister of Jammu and Kashmir. On making enquiries we found that his name was Kunj Lal, a descendant of the royal physicians of the Rajas of Basohli. His house was situated near the temple of Chamunda Devi, not very far from the palace overlooking the tank. The ancient shrine of the Devi was in a neglected state as was evident from the growth of grass all over. Passing through a dilapidated *deorhi* we reached the room in which Kunj Lal dispenses medicines to his patients. A wrinkled old man, fair of complexion, suspicious and wily, he told us that he was a descendant of Maluk Ram, who had been the royal physician to the Rajas Bhupat Pal and Sangram Pal and accompanied them on their trips to the Mughal Court in Delhi. His replies to the queries regarding his collection of paintings were evasive.

His dispensary, disorderly and untidy, was decorated with a number of badly framed Kangra paintings. He stated that they were the creations of one Bhagmal, an artist from Kangra who had lived at Basohli and worked for the Rajas. Kunj Lal had a large collection of books on astrology and medical science both in Hindi and Sanskrit, as well as ancient documents and lease-deeds granted by Rajas of Basohli, which are of historical value. In fact, he has been the main informant of Kahn Singh, the author of the *History of Rajputs of Punjab*. Last year, a theft took place in his house, and he lost property worth about Rs.30,000. This misfortune induced him to make a gift

\* French, J.C., *Himalayan Art*, London, 1930.

of the album of paintings, which are now in the Dogra Art Gallery, Jammu. Apart from the Basohli paintings illustrating the *nayika* theme from Bhanu Dutta's *Rasa Manjari*, it also contains portraits of Raja Bhupat Pal and Raja Medini Pal. There is also a Kangra painting in which Bhupat Pal is shown saluting the Emperor Shah Jahan in Delhi. This must have been painted during the rule of Raja Amrit Pal.

The presence of these paintings in the Kangra style in the collection of the descendant of the royal physicians of Basohli, who is also the custodian of the most authentic collection of Basohli painting which indicates that Rajas of Basohli appreciated Kangra painting and extended their patronage to artists of the new style.

Among the 18th century Basohli Rajas, Amrit Pal (1757-1776) was reputed for his love of painting. He also made substantial additions to the palace at Basohli. During his reign, on account of the unsettled conditions in the plains of the Punjab, his capital became a prosperous town as it was situated on the trade route between India and Kashmir. During his reign, Basohli was a busy centre of painting. The Kangra style was born at Guler and from there it reached Basohli. The Rajas of Guler and Basohli were linked by marital ties.

The hospitable Tehsildar gave me a copy of Kahn Singh's *Tawarikh-i-Rajputan*, which contains valuable information and gives details about the marriages of the Rajas of Basohli—throwing light on the history of the Basohli school of painting. After thanking our hosts, we left Basohli and after a spell on ponyback, proceeded by jeep. For about three miles the vehicle behaved satisfactorily but on a steep incline, about a mile below Thein, it got stuck in the mud. Whether it was an accident or design on the part of the fat Kashmiri driver, we could not decide. As there was no way of extricating the jeep, we walked up to the rest house.

Leopards are commonly found in these mountains and, as we walked up, it was not without the apprehension of being greeted by one. On reaching the bungalow we located the chowkidar with great difficulty. A gang of coolies was sent from Thein, and they managed to extricate the jeep. We thought it inadvisable to risk the remaining part of the journey in such an unsatisfactory vehicle driven by a rascally driver, and decided to rest the night at Thein. When you are landed in an out-of-the-way travellers' bungalow without a bed you have to improvise. Curtains are often used by the people as towels. In the cold of the night these were the only wrappings which we collected from the curtain rods. After passing an almost sleepless night on the hard string beds wrapped in curtains, we rose very early, and and were glad to reach the Canal Rest House at Madhopur where we had left our belongings. We were happy that we had seen Basohli, which has lent its name to a school of painting which preceded the Kangra style, in the hills of the Punjab and Jammu.

My second trip to Basohli was in April 1960, when I was accompanied

by Dr W. G. Archer, Dr M. R. Anand, his wife Shirin, and Secretary Dolly Sahiar. I had no desire to see Basohli again, but my companions expressed great keenness to visit it. The road was bad on account of the floods and was not fit for motor-cars. Hence we decided to travel to Basohli by a lorry. We learnt that Bakshi Ghulam Mohammed was also expected to tour Basohli the same day. This foreboded ill for our journey. At strategic places a number of arches of plantains and mango leaves had been constructed by the villagers who were standing in groups, armed with petitions. Our lorry demolished a number of these arches. Official visits are usually a nuisance. Large number of idlers and loafers collect for the purpose of sight-seeing, apart from the villagers who have complaints to make or want certain requests granted. On reaching Basohli we found that it was no longer quiet. Our apprehensions proved correct. Hordes of officials had gathered for the occasion, like locusts. An exhibition of hand-woven textiles and shawls had been arranged by the officials of the Industries Department, largely for the benefit of the visiting Prime Minister. Except for the ruined palace, which had been virtually turned into a latrine by the villagers, there was no place where we could rest in quiet. A visit to Kunj Lal's house was no more helpful. He had aged quite a lot and was more cryptic than ever. In the game of picture-hunting, one comes across all types of people. There are a few educated and enlightened people who understand that these old paintings are not meant to be cornered and concealed, and should be made available to scholars for study and research. There are some illiterate and uncultured owners of collections who regard outsiders as robbers who come to them with the object of depriving them of their precious hoards. There are others who do not realize the value of these paintings at all, and have often parted with them at ludicrously low prices. Generally, the owners of collections have grossly exaggerated ideas about the value of their collections. Here in Basohli we were certainly regarded as a band of marauders, out on an expedition to loot paintings.

Disappointed with Basohli, we decided to descend to the river to see the stone statue of Bhupat Pal, and to explore the river. A young man volunteered to carry our basket containing food, to the river-bank. We were surprised at this display of helpfulness which was not in evidence anywhere else in Basohli. This young man had mistaken us for film stars. The blue jeans and red blouses which Shirin and Dolly were wearing, were the main cause for our party being mistaken for film stars out on a holiday jaunt to the hills. On reaching the river-bank this romantic youth who was carrying a swimming suit asked Dolly whether she would like to have a swim with him in the river. Dolly declined the honour. We were however amused to discover why this young man was so helpful to us. After spending an hour near the river bank, we were glad to quit Basohli. My first impulse proved to be correct. We should have remained content with having seen Basohli only once. As we left Basohli I said to myself, 'Never again!'



## Last Glance at the Mountains

**W**E SPENT ANOTHER day in the comfort of the Canal Rest House at Madhopur, overlooking the Ravi River. A day's rest was also necessary to shake off the fatigue of the journey to Basohli.

Next morning we made an early start for Jammu. After crossing the bridge over the Ravi we were again at the check-post of Lakhanpur. While the papers were being examined and permits prepared, the Sub-Inspector of Police, in charge of the post, a refugee from West Pakistan who recognized me, entertained us at tea. In spite of the losses they have suffered and hardships they have undergone, the refugees from West Pakistan are known for their generosity and hospitality, and our host was a good example.

We learnt from the Sub-Inspector that Jasrota was not far off from the road leading to Jammu, and we decided to see it on the way. Jasrota was a prosperous Rajput Hindu State where some painting was done under the patronage of Mian Mukand Dev, a dissolute prince. He was so fond of music that even while out hunting, singers of the fair sex, used to accompany him on horse-back. In one of the paintings he is seen riding, preceded by his favourite on horse-back, who is twanging the strings of a *sitar*. A diversion of three miles took us to Jasrota where we discovered the neglected travellers' bungalow which apparently is not often visited by officials or others. With great difficulty the chowkidar was traced. He collected some fire-wood over which we heated our meals. After a hearty meal we started out on an exploration of the village which consisted of a few thatched mud huts, populated by the Hindu and Sikh refugees from the Pakistan-occupied area of Kashmir. We asked them about old Jasrota, and they pointed towards a hillock to the north. Except a ruined gate and a temple there was no sign of any habitation. The entire hill, covered with thorny bushes and jungle trees, was littered with bricks of small size, which indicated that Jasrota was once a prosperous town. Baron Von Hugel, the Austrian traveller, passed through Jasrota in 1835, and mentions that it was in a prosperous condition. Describing Jasrota thus wrote Hugel: "The situation of Jasrota

is much more romantic than the place itself: the hill on which the Raja's house is situated, is also ornamented with four little towers. The last prince was robbed of his territory by Ranjit Singh, and his son, a child, is now at Lahore. A huge irregular arch leads to the paltry bazaar and to the Raja's residence."\* There is no trace now of the bazaar or the Raja's palace.

The sun was hot and I preferred to watch the ruins of Jasrota from under the shade of a pipal. Archer, however, was quite anxious to know more about Jasrota, and he spent quite a while exploring the ruins. The present inhabitants of Jasrota could tell us nothing about the Rajas, their artists or the paintings.

After this wild goose chase we decided to return to the main road to continue our journey to Jammu. On the way was Samba, another fortress town which was once the seat of a Raja. On reaching the fort we discovered that it was being used as a tehsil. We traced the Naib Tehsildar, who, along with his clerks, was sitting in a room. When we made enquiries about the possibility of finding paintings at Samba, he had not the vaguest notion as to what we were talking about. However, he promised to make enquiries from the ancient families of Samba. The trip to Samba proved as futile as our journey to Jasrota, and we were disappointed and down-hearted.

Leaving Samba we pushed on towards Jammu hoping for the best. The road is in good condition, and crossing numerous mountain torrents which are now bridged, we were in sight of the town of Jammu at last. Perched on a shelf, with the Tawi river flowing below, Jammu enjoys a picturesque location. We made our way towards the travellers' rest house which is situated in the heart of the town. Tourists on their way to Kashmir, halt in this rest house, in large numbers. Apart from the noise of loud-speakers blaring film music there is always a crowd of travellers and officials of the Tourist Agency. This rest house, with its dark rooms, noise and confusion, was hardly worthy of its name and we wondered how we could shorten our stay here to the minimum. In this predicament, Providence came to our rescue. In the evening we learnt that Bakshi Ghulam Mohammed, the then Prime Minister of Jammu and Kashmir, was in town. On hearing about our arrival he, invited us to dinner and also arranged for our stay in the State Guest House, which is situated in a quiet locality, outside the town.

Jammu is an ancient principality, with a history which can be traced from the early eleventh century. The earliest known ruler was a Rajput prince Vajradhara who ruled from 1114 to 1118. From the point of view of paintings, the names of the Jammu rulers for the following six centuries are of no significance. It was Raja Balwant Dev, younger brother of Raja Ranjit Dev (1735-81) who was an ardent patron of art. Nain Sukh, a pioneer artist of Kangra style, worked for him and has left a signed and dated

\* Hugel, C., *Travels in Kashmir and the Punjab*, London, 1845, p. 63.

portrait of Balwant Dev's darbar, which was painted in 1748. The first 12 years of his rule Ranjit Dev spent as a captive of Zakaria Khan, the Mughal Governor of the Punjab, while Ghansar Dev, his younger brother, ruled in his place. Ranjit Dev was set at liberty in 1747. The invasions of Ahmad Shah Durrani had spread confusion in the Punjab plains and Ranjit Dev, who was a resolute man of great administrative ability, soon consolidated his power in the hills. He was a broad-minded prince with no religious prejudices. He gave shelter to a number of distinguished Moslem political refugees. One of them was Malka Zamani, a Mughal queen from Delhi and another was Mughalani Begum, the widow of Mir Mannu, the Governor of Lahore. Attracted by the peace which the place enjoyed, a number of rich Muslim merchants settled in Jammu and added to its prosperity. It seems that in the latter part of the reign of Ranjit Dev, painting in the Kangra style flourished at Jammu. An excellent portrait of Ranjit Dev, now in the collection of Raja of Lambagraon, exists. It shows Ranjit Dev in his old age, and may have been painted about 1760-70. Ranjit Dev was succeeded in 1781 by his son Brajraj Dev, a debauched and dissolute prince.

In 1801 Jammu became a tributary of Maharaja Ranjit Singh. From that year onwards the three brothers Gulab Singh, Dhyani Singh and Suchet Singh, who were descended from Surat Singh, the third brother of Ranjit Dev, played a crucial role in the history of Punjab, Jammu and Kashmir. Dhyani Singh became the Prime Minister of Ranjit Singh and Suchet Singh was one of his important generals. Gulab Singh, who remained in his native hills, was a shrewd person, and was far-sighted enough to realize that the Sikh kingdom was doomed after the death of Ranjit Singh. The Sikh Jats formed the core of the Sikh army. They were hardy, impetuously brave, independent and self-willed. As a rule, they did what seemed right to them, and did not accept a 'no' from any man. Impatient of the control exercised over them by their officers, they regarded themselves masters of Punjab, after the demise of Ranjit Singh. The anarchic tendencies of the Sikh soldiers, each one of whom regarded himself as a leader, sealed the fate of this short-lived kingdom in the north. After the death of Ranjit Singh in 1839, Gulab Singh virtually became the independent ruler of the Jammu hills. His General, Zorawar Singh, invaded Western Tibet in 1841 and conquered Ladakh. On the defeat of the Sikh army by the British in the Second Sikh War, Gulab Singh was given by a separate treaty the *de jure* possession of the Jammu and Kashmir area, including Ladakh. Large number of paintings in the Sikh style were executed during the reign of Gulab Singh (1846-57) and his successor, Ranbir Singh (1857-85). Some of these portraits and equestrian studies are magnificent. In them we see these Dogra rulers with beards parted in the middle of the chin, and combed towards the ears with a fierce coquetry. Enveloped in gold brocades, wearing magnificent turbans, armed with swords and pistols, the Dogra chiefs with their arrogant

upturned moustaches are relics of the Sikh court of Lahore, when it was at its acme of grandeur.

Jammu town has no buildings of any great antiquity and its temples are all of recent origin. We paid a visit to Raghunath temple, also called Maharani ka Mandir, which was built by the Rani of Maharaja Ranbir Singh from Bandharalta. There is no image of any artistic merit in this temple, and as in the case of most Hindu temples of the north, the place was full of sadhus and beggars.

After seeing the temples we were taken to the palace of the Maharaja. This brick-red building, which looks like an English country-house, enjoys a picturesque location. The Tawi river flows below the palace, and then follows range after range of low hills which disappear in the purple haze. To the right, was the town of Jammu, a vast confusion of cube-like houses. I turned my disappointed gaze from the works of man to the glorious mountain scenery in front, and for a while was lost in a reverie. How delightful would it be to watch the monsoon clouds sailing in the valley below, and to see the drops of rain mingling with the current of the river.

Maharaja Karan Singh was away in Nepal, but we were shown his collection of paintings by his Secretary. There were a number of masterpieces from Guler, including portraits of Raja Prakash Chand, and paintings illustrating the seasons, and love-lorn heroines. The collection also included the famous series of Nala-Damayanti paintings, 47 in number, which illustrate the early cantos of Shri Harsha's *Naishadhacharitam*. How happy would have been Coomaraswamy to have seen these paintings! He had reproduced in the *Catalogue of the Museum of Fine Arts*, Boston, some of the drawings which illustrate anecdotes from the *Naishadhacharitam*. Here now were the paintings by the same master artist. We learnt that this collection of paintings had been presented to Maharaja Karan Singh by Kunj Lal who, when we met him at Basohli, gave evasive replies to our queries. We were happy to learn that this collection was now in the hands of a man of culture and understanding and a scholar who would preserve them. The discovery of these paintings made up for the fatigue of the journey and our failures on the way.

Intoxicated with the joy of discovery, we returned to the State Guest House. In the afternoon we paid a visit to the Dogra Art Gallery which is located in a Gandhi memorial building. The paintings, some of which were from the collection of Kunj Lal of Basohli, were spread out in two rooms. They were badly framed and crowded on the walls. Most of these paintings are illustrations to Bhanudatta's *Rasamanjari*, a 16th century Sanskrit text on erotics, and are in Basohli style. Archer was very much moved by the glowing vibrant colours of the paintings of the *Rasamanjari* series. So we decided to photograph all of them. The Museum had no arrangement to open the frames of the paintings. We hired a carpenter from the town who removed the nails of the frames and opened out the paintings. We decided to make

the best use of the facilities which were now available due to the intervention of the Prime Minister of Jammu and Kashmir, and asked the carpenter to open the frames of all the worthwhile paintings. When I think of the liberty we took with this collection of paintings, in opening their frames and taking the paintings out in the sun in order to photograph them, I am reminded of my visit to the British Museum in London in 1960. After spending half a day looking through their collection of paintings and jotting down their numbers I asked about the procedure for obtaining their photographs. I learnt that a form had to be filled and later, some authority was to decide whether the photographs could be sold. Even after following this dilatory procedure, the red-tape of the British Museum proved to be too strong and I had to leave London without obtaining any photographs.

On our return to the Guest House from Dogra Art Gallery, we dropped the official car and I gave a tip of two rupees to the Kashmiri motor driver. He was perhaps accustomed to higher tips. There was no sign of any gratitude; on the contrary, there was such a sneer on his face that with great difficulty I resisted the temptation of taking back the money from him. He was the driver of an official car and was not expected to receive tips. The people of Kashmir, because of their contact with tourists, have lost their self-respect. When I mentioned this incident to the Manager of the Guest House, he said, "If you see a Kashmiri shivering in a room and you ask him to sit in the sun he will ask, 'What will you pay me for it?'" The Manager was correct in this observation. If you photograph any person in Kashmir his immediate demand is for payment for the photograph taken, as if in the process he had been deprived of something precious.

In the evening I sat in the verandah of the Guest House when a visitor from one of the villages in Jammu turned up. Talking to him I asked: "What is the biggest change you see in the people of the hills since Independence?"

"Formerly they were shy and submissive but now they are more assertive."

"That may not be all to the good. Possibly they have also shed their politeness and good manners."

"Some may have. Largely they have gained in self-respect. Even the so-called depressed classes, whom Gandhi gave the euphemistic name of 'Harijans', are no longer afraid of the officials or even of their erstwhile Rajas."

"Now they do not even respect the Rajas whom they used to honour with deep bows almost touching the earth."

"You must have heard about Raja X in Kangra Valley who enjoys the reputation of being a Don Juan. Recently one of his servants filed a criminal case against him, alleging that he had molested his wife. Formerly the servants of the Rajas regarded it as an honour if their wives happened to attract the attention of their masters. Could you imagine a thing like this happening ten years ago?"

I have described Jammu. Now about the people of Jammu. They call themselves Dogras, or men of the valley. Like the Hindus of India, they are divided into castes—the Rajputs, the Brahmins, the Mahajans, the Meghs and the Doms. The Dogra Rajputs of Jammu with their chiselled features and bronze colour, are a handsome race. Like the Hidalgos of Spain they regard the bearing of arms only as their true profession and have left manual labour, including the ploughing of land, to other castes. Even when they attempt to cultivate the land they make poor farmers, for agriculture requires patient hard work for which they have no aptitude. In the villages most of them are idlers, who while away their time shooting pigeons and doves, or philandering with the women of lower castes. The result of the land reforms has been that they have suffered most from this aversion to work, and most of the fertile lands owned by them have gone to their lower-class tenants. Their profession is what they call service, meaning military or State service which does not include manual work. They make good soldiers, and apart from their smart appearance, are sturdy and well-disciplined. Next come the Thakurs, the main cultivating caste in the Jammu hills. The Meghs and Doms are the landless labourers. The merchant castes, who mostly reside in Jammu are sharp and intelligent and have taken full advantage of the benefit of modern education.

The journey to Jammu was the last in my travels in 1960, in search of paintings. On the return journey we were half inclined to visit Ramnagar where there are murals in some temples constructed by Maharaja Ranbir Singh. The road to Ramnagar was bad, and we turned towards our base, the Canal Rest House at Madhopur.

We had a last look at the mountains which nurtured such a beautiful art in which tender emotions of mankind are depicted in exquisite lines and joyful colours. French aptly stated that these artists had the colours of the dawn and the rainbow on their palette. These paintings carry us back to an older and simpler world which was not tortured by the noise of loud-speakers, the din of motor vehicles, and the threats of an atomic holocaust. Walking in the fields of ripe wheat in the cool phosphorescent light of the full moon, we could see the noble outlines of the mountains of the Kangra Valley to our right with their thousand peaks of snowy whiteness. To our left, was the snowy arc of Pir Punjal of Kashmir, below which the Valley slumbered in calm repose. My heart was filled with emotion as we turned back to the Punjab plains and had a last glance at the mountains. I was happy that this journey in search of paintings had proved fruitful. I also had a feeling of regret that it had come to an end, and we would soon be in the monotonous dusty plains away from the mountains, their glacial stream brimming with ice-cold sparkling water and their pure invigorating air scented with the resin of the pines.

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